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SOWING THE WIND.

SOWING THE WIND.

A NOVEL.

BY

E. LYNN LINTON,

AUTHOR OF 'LIZZIE LORTON OF GREYRIGG,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SOWING THE WIND.



CHAPTER I.

LIFE IN SEYMOUR STREET.

WHAT was to be done? The more closely St. John looked into his affairs the more clearly he made out the net result—Ruin. By the sale of everything he might pay all he owed, and so avoid the Bankruptcy Court ; but it must be by the rigid sale of everything—not a toy, not a trinket kept back—no reserve for either love or fancy. Isola's little fortune must go—indeed had already gone ; nothing was secured but the five hundred pounds settled on the boy ; and this reserve fretted St. John more than all the rest.

To hear him hold forth on the injustice of this reservation, coupled with the cost of the child's maintenance, one would think it had been the cause of all his disasters. If he could but lay his hand on that five hundred pounds, he might retrieve himself even now at the eleventh hour, he used to say fretfully. Such and such shares were in the market, and rising rapidly—five hundred would become a thousand in only so many hours calculable by any one understanding business; and then he would take out his pocket-book and make elaborate sums, the outcome of which was a princely fortune from the small nucleus at the top of the page. Yes, that five hundred had been wrongfully assigned in the beginning, and now it was even more disastrous for the potentiality of regain that it lost him.

“But in the meantime, dear?” Isola used to say, when St. John wandered off into useless railings and reproaches.

Well! in the meantime they must leave the Hermitage, sell the Hyde Park Square house and furniture, go into lodgings, and look about them.

Going into lodgings and looking about them did not seem a very definite prospect to Isola ; but her husband had nothing more precise to propose, so she had to make out the details as she best could.

And while she was making them—arranging in her own mind what ought to be given for the lodgings ; and what their food ought to cost weekly ; and how she should manage with baby not to let St. John be plagued by him more than could possibly be helped ; and what she could do to make money—at least enough for herself and the child, not to be a burden on her husband, a letter came from the Osborns who had heard of St. John's crash from Harvey Wyndham, offering a home at Seymour Street till something could be done.

It was from Jane to Isola, and was one of her most characteristic letters. No loving words nor soft expressions, no waste of sympathy for the sorrow which had brought the proud Aylott blood so low, no blame, no excuses ; simply a broad and generous offer of home and help until they could better themselves.

“*You* must work, Isola, for yourself and the boy,” wrote Jane, underlining the *you*; “it will be as much as your husband can do to get bread for himself. I doubt if he can do even so much! In the meantime come here till you know exactly what you can do, and what you cannot. If you are rich enough to pay rent—pay it by all means; you might as well give us the advantage of letting our rooms as any one else—but if you cannot pay it you need not. It is a dull time of the year and you are welcome to the rooms till you can better yourselves; and you need not thank me, Isola. I hate being thanked for common sense. I am not a bad worker—having had a pretty good experience that way; and I can put you in the way of getting money perhaps better than many others with more apparent influence. So I take the thing to be decided—unless you are a greater fool than I imagine—and shall look out for you at the station when I know your train—second-class remember; you must buckle to at once, Isola, and without flinching—and let there be no parrots nor lapdogs nor rubbish of that kind.

Life is too earnest a matter for anything in the way of stupid waste."

This was the way in which Jane Osborn did things; utterly unlovely and ungraceful as to form, but with the core ever straight and true—with ever the one steadfast spirit, that of fraternal help where help was needed. But no finery with it—no phrasing as she called it; just honest help honestly offered, and if not accepted for what it was worth, then let it be rejected.

It was a dangerous moment for Isola and a bitter one to St. John, when she told him of Jane Osborn's letter. At first he refused passionately—"did they already think to treat him as a pauper?"—"had he fallen so low that even Jane Osborn could presume to patronize him?"—"did they think that a little temporary want of money had brought him down to their level?" with other foolish words of an angry man and a proud one, not yet chastened into the wisdom of submission to events.

Isola let him rave unheeded. She knew that trying to put things into a truer light, would only

displease him more, so she sat quietly while he paced about the room—"prancing like a puma," Marcy used to say—abusing Jane Osborn, and Richard Norton, and Gilbert Holmes, and Isola, and the baby, and the engineer of the Mary Morrison coal-pit, and coal-pits in general—and perhaps more bitterly than all the rest, the butler who had neglected to brush his coat last night as the first instalment of the insolent neglect to come.

And when he had talked himself tired and consequently calmer, she asked him again, "But what am I to say to Jane, dear?"

"Say!" he answered irritably, "say that I consider her confoundedly impertinent!"

"I cannot well do that," Isola replied with a deliberative air, as if she had weighed the feasibility of such a thing and found it would not quite do. Then she added, looking at him steadily, "But if money is likely to be scarce with you just at present, St. John, would it not be as well on the whole to go there?—at least they will not press for payment."

"And live upon a couple of miserable women?"

exclaimed St. John grandly. "Thank you! but I should prefer some rather more honourable mode of existence. Such things may suit your taste and ideas—they do not suit mine."

"No, I did not mean to live on them," she said, her face slightly flushing; "but as they know you better than mere strangers would, if you had not money always at command they would trust you."

"As I have generally been trusted, Isola," coldly; "I do not see such a wonderful advantage in that. I do not suppose I look like a swindler."

"No, not wonderful at all, and you are not likely to be taken for a swindler," smiling a little constrainedly; "but it is an advantage to have to deal with people who know and respect one, especially in a dark hour like this."

"Oh, I see! of course it will not do for me to oppose what you have made up your mind to!" cried St. John. "Yes, let us go there by all means," with affected complaisance. "I should be sorry to thwart you, Isola, especially just at present when I want to have my mind undis-

turbed ; for if I were to oppose your inclinations I know what would be the result—not a kind word or affectionate look for weeks to come ; and all after misfortunes or disagreeables due solely to this refusal of mine to live on the Osborns. Yes, let us go there—right or wrong let us go, so long as you are satisfied and I have not to endure your temper, as well as other worries.”

“ But St. John—” began Isola.

“ There ! there ! say no more about it ! You have had your own way, as you always do, so what need of further words on the matter ? I would do even more than this to please you, Isola, if you would only be pleased ! ” with a sudden outburst of tenderness as causeless as his anger.

And Isola could not help thinking that, suffering himself to be cared for and accepting a generous offer, was rather an odd way of showing condescension and a desire to please. But St. John was too proud to be grateful ; service was too much his right to need the recognition of thanks. He would accept as his due all service, all sacrifice, but he would not acknowledge

any gratitude ; it was his right, he said proudly ; was he not a gentleman, and so placed by God in the upper places of humanity, both by sex and social law ? His wife then, because his wife—and low people like the Osborns, because they were low—owed him all possible sacrifice and deference ; but he owed nothing back to them, save the grace of acceptance. That was his privilege because he was a man and a gentleman—his mother, Honor Wilson, Massinger's model, nevertheless.

It was decided then that they should go to Seymour Street ; and now for the first time St. John Aylott felt that he was poor and understood the personal bearings of his ruin. Hitherto it had been an idea, a picture, a name ; now it was a reality and a presence. To be no longer master was worse than to be no longer possessor. To live in a house where the servants were not his, where the arrangements were not his, and where he must accept the taste and possessions of others, was a greater trial than to sell his horses or give up his carriage. The one was a want, the other was

a presence ; and of the two there is not much doubt which is the more terrible to suffer. Poor St. John ! he was to be pitied !—for it was a stern baptism into the realities of life, and all the sterner as it came to a nature weakened by factitious supports and conventional overlays.

The Osborns were very kind ; but that fact alone, wanting all others, would have rendered St. John miserable. That people of their social calibre should be able to be “kind” to him ! Did he need a deeper humiliation ?

Mrs. Osborn was perhaps less offensive to him than was Jane. She had still over her that subtle sheen of good breeding got in youth, and only in youth, and never lost through any subsequent rasping of poverty ; and she was one of those plastic feminalities who love to cosset and flatter men of superior condition, and to whom birth and breeding are before money, and good looks and youth irresistible. So, though she fussed and fluttered about in a way that would have driven some men mad, yet St. John condoned the flutter for the sake of the flattery, and found

his greatest consolation at times in Mrs. Osborn's society, and the praises and attentions she poured out like incense before him. Incense he must have, whatever the sacrificial vessel in which it was offered; and in default of Marcy then Juliana.

As for Jane the enmity between the two was a thing too patent to be denied. He detested her and all her ways, and she despised him, and took no pains to conceal her contempt. She did what she could for him simply because he was a poor creature, and could do nothing for himself; but she had a supreme contempt for him all the while, and the greater her active help, the larger her disdain.

"A man milliner!" she used to say to her mother, sniffing; "a miserable creature to whom life is all outside, who has not manliness enough to see into the truth or meaning of anything!—a mere bit of conventionality that cares more about a clean tablecloth, and a dish set square on the table, than he does for truth or honesty or any other grave reality. And yet because he is a man, and

she is a woman, he bullies that wife of his who is worth twenty of him, and pretends to act the master when he is not fit to be the lackey! He makes me sick to see him with his clean nails and scented hair. How I wish he would sometimes be dirty and untidy! I would rather see him with a broom in his hand sweeping the crossing than as neat and careful and well got up as he is now!"

"My dear Jane, I do not wonder at your not getting on well with Mr. Aylott," returned her mother. "You are a good girl, Jane, but you do not appreciate a gentleman. If you did, you would know how to value Mr. Aylott better."

"A gentleman!" snapped Jane. "I hope I can appreciate a Man at any rate!—a man who can work, and take life as it is, and not as if we were all a set of mummers masquerading in silk and velvet—a man like Harvey Wyndham, or like father, or even Gilbert Holmes—though I don't know so much of him. But a creature like this St. John Aylott—a wretched band-box ape—pah! The sooner he is shaken out of his

affectations and set to real work the better for every one ; and so I tell Isola."

"Then so you need *not* tell Isola, Jane," said Mrs. Osborn warmly. "Isola is quite ready enough to be a strong-minded young woman like yourself, Miss ; you need not try to set her against her poor dear husband. And he one of the most elegant young men I have seen for years !"

"Yes, that is just it," cried Jane ; "the most elegant young man one sees anywhere ! Just a modern Turveydrop and nothing else. And that you call a man !" indignantly.

"No, Jane, I don't, I call him a gentleman," said Mrs. Osborn with her finest emphasis ; "I should not take such a liberty as to call him a man !"

"Oh, mamma ! you and St. John Aylott are well matched !" was Jane's impertinent rejoinder as she left the room rudely.

Another misery to poor St. John in their present way of life was the baby. It was bad enough to live in a dingy street in poorly-fur-

nished rooms, waited on by a slipshod servant-girl, sometimes with her face blackened with soot—generally with her sleeves tucked above her elbow—going about on washing-day with her hands and arms smoking, creased, sodden, and redolent of soap-suds—never clean—never well dressed—and knowing her business about as well as a ploughboy would know the duties of a court chamberlain; it was bad enough to have every meal spoilt in the cooking, swimming in fat or powdered with cinders, and served so ill that had the food been even well dressed St. John could not have eaten it, because of the discomfort of the appointments; it was bad enough to be under the same roof with Jane, and to be associated with Mrs. Osborn on terms of equality; but what was all this to the horror of the constant presence of the child! Had he had his choice he would have gone through twice his present amount of personal discomfort to get rid of that infliction.

At the Hermitage the little fellow had been a fact in the background, grumbled at truly, but

seldom seen and never actively felt : he had been a latent sore and fretted at even then ; but now he was an active nuisance, and his presence nearly drove St. John mad.

Isola did what she could to keep him out of his way, and to prevent more annoyance than was absolutely unavoidable. She used to go downstairs to Mrs. Osborn's room, and get her to take the child for a time, and she used to sit in her bedroom, and so keep him from her husband. But it was impossible to suppress the poor little fellow altogether, especially as St. John never left the house ; and do what she would, she could not always keep him good nor prevent the burst of baby laughter or the roar of baby grief that so much vexed her husband. Shrill screams and prolonged yells would sometimes break forth ; and then St. John would appear at the door, pale with passion and quivering in every nerve, and say in a low hoarse voice, " Silence that child, Isola, else by heavens I will cut its throat ! "

Which naturally had the effect of making her

love the baby more than ever, since she was the protector as well as mother. Besides, the very difficulty of her position roused up what might be called the stubbornness of duty. She had undertaken this charge when it sat lightly on her, and was a sentiment rather than a daily office, and she would not abandon it now because it pressed on her shoulders heavily, and left but little margin for other things. The very need of sacrifice involved in her care of the little fellow was an additional tie ; and she found, as all women with large maternal instincts do find, that the more demands he made on her patience, her unselfishness, her devotion, the more she loved him, and the closer he grew into her life. But St. John's hatred increased daily ; and his anger at Isola's love and care for his sister's son was sometimes absolute insanity, which neither time nor habit softened.

It was well for Isola that she was a woman of healthy nerves and patient cheerfulness, else her life would have been very trying to her at this moment, and with not much more brightness in the

future. St. John would still do nothing in the way of work. Harvey Wyndham came and went incessantly, and jingled the great city thimbles jauntily; but even Harvey could not rouse him from his sullen apathy, nor shake him out of the miserable moodiness which had set in.

It was strange to see them together now, and to remember the time when they had first met in Mr. Norton's office. Harvey spruce, well-favoured, a little patronizing, business-like, prosperous, having caught the golden wheel just at the turn; and St. John gloomy, penniless, depressed, flung from his pleasant holding, and lying in the dust, whence there seemed but small chance of after rising:—Harvey full of important affairs, seeming to make his income chiefly by dashing about in Hansom cabs, and going into the city to “see fellows”; and St. John confining himself moodily to the house, with no pleasure in to-day and no hope for to-morrow.

Yet when they had first met, Harvey had set a nearer acquaintance before him as one of the great chances of his life, and had felt himself as

far below the dean's rich grandson as men slipping rapidly into the hands of the sheriff's officers do feel themselves below others with a balance at their banker's, and the weekly bills all paid and filed. It was patronage now but it had been prostration then ; and though the patronage was administered in a gay, off-hand, dashing kind of way, as had been the prostration, still the dress did not transform the body, and manner does not always effectually disguise intention.

St. John gave no sign of seeing anything in the past or present. He did not blame the literary handy-man for what had befallen ; as indeed how should he ? Harvey made the most candid and explicit statements of how such and such things had happened, and by no means blinked the fact of his own superior luck. Indeed, the two had gone side by side in a way truly marvellous. He used to say St. John's ill-luck and his own good fortune had kept together step by step, and for every degree the one had fallen the other had risen. No one was to blame, that was one blessing, said Harvey piously ; it

was all fair play and the fortune of war. And St. John acquiesced, without bitterness as towards Harvey the leader of that fortune.

Still, he would not rouse himself. Harvey was indefatigable in his efforts to set things straighter, but St. John would not be set straight. He was always going to see what could be done, but he never went ; and the Osborns boarded and lodged and attended to him and Isola with no question of remuneration ever crossing the poor proud gentleman's brain. And Harvey said it never would cross it, so long as he found his account in keeping it out.

"Turn him out, Mrs. Osborn," he used to say after one of his fruitless interviews with the broken-down gentleman. "Take my word for it, you will never see the colour of his money so long as you go on like this. He will do nothing unless he is driven to it ; starved out, in fact."

But Mrs. Osborn wiped her eyes when he said this one day, and answered delicately ; "Poor dear soul ! and such an elegant-looking young man, and all his shirt-fronts and things so beautiful !

It does seem such a shame that he has not got everything nice about him; and I don't think, Mr. Wyndham, that I'll give him notice just yet."

While Jane only answered in her rough, rude way; "Wait a bit, Wyndham, don't let us be too hard on the poor fellow. He is a miserable creature, I admit—a thing I should be ashamed of if he were a brother of mine—but I don't like to be hard on him for all that. Wait a bit, and let us see how things turn."

"My good fellow! it is your business, not mine!" said Harvey Wyndham jocularly. "If you are able to keep a man and his wife and a small boy out of your pay from the 'Comet,' you are in greater luck than I have ever been in, that's all. But you know your affairs the best; only I advise you again—force him to do something for himself. Without external pressure he will do nothing, and you can't go on playing at benevolence and feeding the hungry for ever, Jane. This kind of thing does very well for a time, you know, but it don't pay in the long run!"

“I know that,” said Jane; “but we are not getting much into debt—at least, not yet. Isola is not extravagant, and she is a grand creature altogether, that I must say. I never thought she would have come out as she has done when I first saw her in that toy-shop of theirs in Hyde Park Square. She has come out wonderfully, Wyndham, and I couldn’t hurt her.”

“You are a regular brick, Jane!” said Harvey Wyndham with genuine warmth. “Talk of splendid creatures, why you yourself are the jolliest old fellow going!”

“That’s nonsense,” said Jane rubbing her nose; but she looked pleased in spite of her disclaimer; and all the more pleased because of the familiar manner and slangy diction, which made her feel as if she and Wyndham were real chums she used to say, and showed her that he thought there was no nonsense about her. It was the one weakness of this strong-minded woman—she liked to have her sex ignored, and to be treated as a man among men, with no more respect, no more softness, no more consideration.

It was the greatest compliment that could be paid her, she always said; and when Harvey Wyndham wanted specially to elate her he called her a good old fellow and a fine old chap, and placed the more decent pages of the slang dictionary at her disposal.

There used to be frequent quarrels between Jane and her mother respecting this familiarity and slang, and for once poor Mrs. Osborn was in the right. But Jane would not give way; she held to it as the symbol of her condition, and Harvey was too much amused to care for anything else. So the better-bred lady was put down, and her capable and ungainly daughter had her will in this as in most other things of her life.

She could not manage St. John Aylott though. She could neither rouse nor incense him to active energy. He would never come down off his pedestal to her—was never anything but the fine gentleman condescending to her level; he ate her bread, and he was sheltered under her roof, but he was always the Brahmin and she the

Pariah ; and for once Jane Osborn found more than her match in will, if less than her equal in force. So things went on from week to week without change or mending. Harvey lent his victim small sums of five pounds or so at a time—he did this as a kind hush-money to his conscience—and St. John accepted the loan loftily, as a mere banker's accommodation to be repaid in the way of business ; and the Osborns kept and fed the three, helped a little by the sale of every valuable thing still left to Isola from the general wreck. But still St. John would not work, and still was always going to see about it, and never stirring an inch in the way of search.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRETARYSHIP.

DURING those first few weeks of ruin nothing was seen of Gilbert Holmes. He was out of town on business, and though he had written more than once to St. John, letters full of honest counsel and manly sympathy, yet Isola had neither known nor heard of them, and the time seemed very long to her since she had last seen her brother—her one sole friend. And she was not ashamed to own it to herself—that friendship was very, very dear to her.

“Why not? what is there in friendship of which any one need be ashamed?” she said to Jane ingenuously, when speaking of Gilbert, and wondering when she should see him again.

And Jane made answer, "Certainly not, Isola, if you keep to friendship. But women are such weak creatures in general, and men are so selfish, they don't often give each other a chance of anything rational, and after a time are sure to drift into philandering and sentimentality; and Lord! how I do hate that kind of thing!"

"Oh! girls may do that, but not married women!" said Isola in deprecation.

"Married women, child? they are as great fools as any!" said Jane tossing back her dishevelled hair disdainfully. "Do you think because a woman marries that she loses her folly and becomes wise *ex officio*? or even that she leaves off caring for admiration? The greatest flirts in the world are married women—why, you know that;—and the most heartless too, because there is nothing but selfishness and vanity in it all. They have no excuse for inexperience, or being led away, or not knowing their own minds, as might be made for girls. No, so far as that goes, Isola, friendships with married women are perhaps rarer and more dangerous than with

single ones ; so take care ! When Gilbert Holmes comes to see you—”

“ You will like and respect him as much as I do, Jane,” said Isola eagerly, “ and he will like and respect you.”

“ Then I *shall* respect him,” Jane made answer quite gravely. “ For a man must have something in him out of the common way, and he must be good too, who could like such a woman as I am, without a single attraction, as the phrase goes. Odd as the words may sound, Isola—but you know what I mean, you have brains enough to understand one !—I have an enormous respect for any one who likes me.”

“ Why respect, dear ? why should not people like you ?” Isola said affectionately.

“ Because I am so queer and so unpleasant,” Jane answered.

“ No ! no ! cousin Jane ! not unpleasant.”

“ Oh yes, I am, Isola ; very unpleasant ; rude, and rough, and brusque, and all that. I know quite well that I am not like other women, and I don’t try to be like them, and could not if I

did try. I go about the world feeling myself something like Beauty's Beast—only not quite so amiable perhaps, for he was a good sort of a beast, though rather muffish too—but just the most unlovely disagreeable woman in the world, though not a bad fellow at heart."

"Bad! you are just one of the best and dearest 'fellows' in the world!" said Isola putting her arm round her—Isola was the only person who ever caressed Jane Osborn, and the only person whom she would have allowed to caress her—"the very best woman I know anywhere!" she added warmly.

"No, that is just what I am not," said Jane with the same odd, almost pathetic honesty of self-analysis. "I am not a bad fellow, but I am not a good woman; scarcely a woman in the moral sense at all; and I don't want to be one, for I think them such desperate slaves and cowards, and such donkeys too!—and I would rather be the Beast ten times over than a slave or a coward. But of course this is the very thing which makes me such a queer wretch!

There is nothing purely feminine about me. I don't like babies ; I despise obedient wives ; I'd like to strangle the whole lot of curled and scented lady-killers ; and I think love the veriest rubbish and moonshine in the world ; if dress-making depended on me we should go about in sacks or blankets ; and I have an utter contempt for all the graces and prettinesses of life from first to last : so that's not being a good woman you see. A good woman ! no ! I am not that, whatever else I may be. What a queer world it would be if all you creatures were like me !” she added laughing grimly.

“We should be better in some things and not so good in others,” Isola said. “Some one must look after the babies, you know.”

“Why, yes ; and some one must look after lambs and calves and puppies and kittens, and all other helpless little creatures.”

“No ! more than that—with love, with pride, and pleasure and self-absorption,” urged Isola with darkened eyes.

“And Georgie Porgie ride in a coachy poachy, I suppose !” sniffed Jane disdainfully.

"Yes, and with baby nonsense too, Jane."

"Well! it may be so," Jane said. "I'm not in that line myself; so you see Isola if that kind of thing is absolutely necessary as you say, it wouldn't do for you all to be like me!"

"Well—we should want a little more softness, a little more caressing faculty, certainly," said Isola candidly.

And Jane answered, "You most undoubtedly would, Isola," just as candidly. "And now I am going to do what your soft women cannot do!" she said with a certain accent of pride in her rough voice. "I am going to write a leader for a daily. Ah, you may talk as you like, Isola!—babies, and love, and the graces and prettinesses are all very fine, I dare say, but give me the real solid pleasure of work—a man's work—work that influences the world—work that is power! To sit behind the scenes and pull the strings—to know that what one says as *We* in the 'Comet' is taken among thinking men as a new gospel, when if one had said it as I, Jane Osborn, it would have been sneered at as woman's

babble—to feel that strange thrill of secret mental power—no, I would not give up that for all the happiness of your so called womanly women ! You do not know the intense delight of such a life as mine,” she continued fervently. “ Poor, shabby, ugly, hard-worked, an absolute negation of all charms and all apparent pleasures—to look at there is nothing in me for any one to envy ; and yet, Isola, when I think of myself as one of the real influential workers of the world—one of the uncatalogued movers of society and men’s minds—I feel as if I had found the treasure which you are all seeking, and that my share in life has been a Benjamin’s mess ! You won’t understand me, I dare say,” she added with a nervous laugh. “ No one does but Wyndham, and even he thinks me high-flown.”

“ I should not think he could understand you as well as I do. He has no enthusiasm for anything,” said Isola hastily.

“ Ah ! you are not just to Wyndham,” said Jane rubbing her nose. “ He is as good a fellow as ever lived ; but I confess myself I wish he was

not getting quite such a swell. We were somehow more chums together when he was poorer and a vagabond."

"I wish he went away from London," said Isola; "I should like never to see him again."

"Don't be a baby, Isola," said Jane Osborn magisterially; "and please don't speak of what you don't understand."

With which she walked out of the room; that being the best way in which she could keep all square, as she expressed her desire not to quarrel with Isola and not to hear Harvey Wyndham run down.

Shortly after this Gilbert Holmes called. Jane, who took all manner of odd liberties when it came into her head to do so, herself brought up the new visitor. She wanted to see how the friends met, that so she might be able to judge of their feelings for each other; though, good, honest, clumsy thing as she was, she knew no more of the finesse of love-making than she knew of babies or fine-ladyism; and might have been deceived by a couple of astute players carrying

on their perilous game under her very eyes. Marcy Tremouille, with no brains to speak of as Jane catalogued brains, would have blinded her as completely as if she had hoodwinked her with a bandage.

So Jane brought up Gilbert Holmes, to watch Isola's face when they met; with about as much chance of reading it—had there been anything to read, or had she seen it—as a school-girl set to decipher Arabic or Hebrew.

St. John was in the room alone, sitting opposite the fire. It was one of those wet cold spring days when a fire is certainly a great luxury, and sure to be found in well-conditioned houses, but when careful housekeepers, troubled to make the gaping ends of necessity and income approximate, not to say meet, would not dream of having a stick alight save in the kitchen. But St. John could not compass careful housekeeping yet; and for all that Jane had sniffed most violently when the order was given, and recommended a brisk walk in Regent's Park as better for him than a stuffy fire, and for all that Isola had only yester-

day taken especial pains to make the hearth look clean and pretty with fresh pink paper newly cut—the fire had to be laid and lighted; and St. John sat himself in the uncomfortable easy-chair straight before it, passing the day in a kind of dreamy doze, which however did not let him forget that he was very miserable and had been somehow illused.

“Here, Mr. St. John, here is somebody to wake you up!” said Jane, coming into the room in her noisiest manner. “I should think you must be dazed sitting there all day long doing nothing. Where’s Isola?”

St. John looked round angrily as Jane spoke.

“Well, Holmes, and how are you?” he said stiffly, lounging up from his chair as if he was doing Gilbert an honour by rising at all, and ignoring Jane and her question.

“Where’s Isola?” repeated Jane.

“Did you speak?” said Aylott St. John Aylott grandly.

“Yes, I have asked you twice already where Isola was,” snapped Jane.

“Mrs. Aylott?—I am sure I don’t know,” replied the young man coldly. “You had better send the servant to look for her.”

“Rubbish!” said Jane lastly. “We have not servants to send about on every foolish little errand, Mr. St. John. You know that by this time I should think! I dare say she’s upstairs—taken the boy out of the fine gentleman’s way,” she grumbled as she left the room and tramped up the bed-room flight calling at every step, “Isola! Isola! you’re wanted!”

“Here’s a friend come to see you,” she said gruffly, when she had found her cousin in one of the empty upper rooms, keeping the child out of her husband’s way as Jane had surmised.

“Friend? what friend?” answered the young wife quickly.

“Gilbert Holmes; and mind what you are at,” said Jane.

A smile like absolute light broke over Isola’s face. “Oh! has he come at last! I am so glad!” she said radiantly.

“Well, you needn’t tell him so,” said Jane

shortly. "I dare say he knows quite enough of what you feel about him. You needn't be a donkey, Isola, if you can help it."

Jane liked Gilbert Holmes well enough; but she was a little jealous of him too. Somehow or other he seemed to be a rival to Harvey Wyndham in the Aylott sphere; and it troubled her, that Isola, whom she loved and respected, should favour Gilbert, and that St. John who was "such a poor creature" should hold by Harvey.

Isola only laughed back an answer. She was too glad of this pleasant coming to reply in any strain. With her face still lighted up, and the colour deepened in her cheeks, she took the boy in her arms, and went down to see her friend—standing for a moment enframed in the doorway like some lovely picture of the Madonna, with the child clinging round her neck, one dimpled hand upon her face, and the curly head pressed shyly against her throat.

This was how Gilbert had last seen her; and this was how he liked to see her. She was always beautiful to him—always the one woman

he most revered and admired—but she was never so lovely, never so admirable, as when she stood like this with the boy in her arms, as the impersonation of the divine grace of motherhood.

“Pray shut that door—the draught is intolerable!” said St. John peevishly.

And Isola shut it at once, like one accustomed to obey; whereby Jane lost the expression of her face as she came forward into the room, and greeted Gilbert Holmes.

“I am glad to see you look so well, Mrs. Aylott,” said Gilbert. “London I see agrees with you.”

“Yes, any place agrees with me,” she answered.

“She has the constitution of a grenadier and nerves of iron,” said St. John with an unpleasant laugh.

“How much better than to be one of those frail little creatures who cannot bear even the winds of heaven to visit them too roughly!” Gilbert said.

“Oh yes, I dare say; but if you had as much of strong-minded women as I have here, you

would perhaps like a little of the more feminine kind," returned St. John stirring the fire viciously.

"Oh, St. John! I hope I am not unfeminine!" Isola exclaimed. "I am sure it is better to be strong and healthy as I am than to be sickly, and never out of the doctor's hands! What would you do with an invalid wife now? It would be dreadful!"

"You are always in such extremes, Isola!" said St. John pettishly. "You need not be sickly because you are not masculine. How strange it is that women never can reason!—they are always so fond of exaggeration!" he added, still stirring the fire with no gentle hand.

"But does not that agree with the very femineness you advocate?" asked Gilbert.

"I never argue," replied St. John Aylott coldly. "No one ever convinced an opponent yet, and arguments invariably lead to unpleasantness."

"Perhaps you are right," was Gilbert's answer made cheerfully. "As you say, arguments are useless, and I have something better to talk

of to-day than even the exact amount of strength or weakness allowable in a woman. I have an offer to make you."

"Indeed!" said St. John with a supercilious air.

Poor fellow! he could not drop his fine gentlemanhood all at once! It clung to him like a second nature, and had he stood at the street corner to receive alms he would have taken his pence with the air of a man conferring a crown.

"There is a secretaryship afloat," said Gilbert, "and you can have it if you like. Our firm can nominate, and as they have given the business into my hands I have come up to speak to you about it."

"St. John dear!" said Isola in a moved voice, laying her hand on her husband's shoulder. He took it away, not so much unkindly as with a certain lordly air that was merely irritating. Not that her caresses displeased him, but that he liked even in this to play the master.

"And the salary?" he asked of Gilbert still superciliously.

"Three hundred a year," Gilbert answered quite steadily, and giving no sign of consciousness that he was proposing an act of humiliation.

St. John gave a short laugh.

"Thank you, I am sure, Holmes, but I have not come quite so low yet."

"But in the meantime, dear?" interrupted Isola; "until you have found something better?"

"And spoil my chances! How can I look out for something better when I am chained to a desk all day?" said St. John hastily.

"From ten till four," struck in Gilbert.

"The whole business day!" he repeated. "Thank you, Holmes, but that will not do. I must reserve myself for something better."

"But, as Mrs. Aylott says, in the meantime?" said Gilbert.

"My motto in life is to hold out for one's rights," said St. John grandly.

"And not to take the bird in the hand?"

"Only when driven by actual necessity."

"We are driven now," said Isola in a low voice.

“I think you might take this till something better turns up,” Gilbert reasoned very quietly. “The work is easy; the hours not long; it is a stop-gap for the immediate present, and vitiates no future prospects; your friends can still look for you: and in short, Aylott, it is just this—small as it is, it is better than nothing! I would not hesitate myself to accept it, if I were in your place.”

“Which can be no possible rule to me,” said St. John loftily.

“And indeed I would urge you to accept it,” continued the other.

“I must reflect on it,” said St. John. “It is too important a matter to be decided off-hand and without grave consideration. Much will depend on the men with whom I have to work, for it will not be very pleasant in the future when my affairs have righted themselves, to have all the snobs in London claiming me as hail fellow, dating from the time when I was associated with them in the city. I have that part of the future to consider as well as other things.”

“The men composing the society are gentlemen,” said Gilbert quietly. “Men that I don’t think you need have any fear of even when your affairs have righted themselves. See, this is the committee list—a baronet, a colonel, two ship-owners, and a whole batch of private gentlemen. Does that satisfy you?”

“It is not so objectionable as some that I have seen,” was the dry response; and it was well for St. John that Isola was standing by with the child in her arms, to remind Gilbert Holmes why he sought to befriend the dean’s ruined grandson, and why he must have patience with a pride that was absolute insanity by its excess.

After a little more talk at last St. John yielded; always with that same air of condescension, and doing his benefactor a favour, familiar now to most of them: and Isola saw the beginning of a new and honest life—perhaps of one happier, because stronger and with more purpose in it, than they had yet lived together. What indeed but happiness could come from anything that sprang from Brother Gilbert? Are there

not some choice souls to whom is given the blessed power of bringing good luck to those with whom they are connected? And Brother Gilbert was one of these, she said to herself, raising her blue eyes to his with a look of gratitude that made his heart bound like a girl's. Yes, this secretaryship of only three hundred a-year would prove a fairy gift to them, she thought, and everything would now go well, and they would all be happy and noble in their lives together. Dear Brother Gilbert!—oh! how happy they were to have that great, strong, noble heart as their friend! Child and brother—could any woman ask for more!

She forgot to add the husband in the list of her life's treasures; and perhaps if she had been asked, she would have said, if she had confessed quite truly, that he was scarcely so much a treasure as the others; specially when he peremptorily ordered her "to silence that squalling little wretch," as the boy began to coo and babble in her arms, pulling at her curling golden hair, and patting her face, and tearing at her ripe red lips

as if they had been things he could carry away with him, to kiss when the humour took him. And when St. John said this, Isola, always nervously careful to avoid offence, took the baby down to Mrs. Osborn and sat out the rest of Gilbert's visit without him.

But she liked better to have him in her arms when with her brother Gilbert. She had a vague sentiment of the Holy Family about her then—that sentiment which is in itself the spiritual meaning of maternity; and she felt, without coquetry but with intense delight, that she was more pleasing to him as the mother than under any other character. Which in itself was a tie between them. For though women resent being held as nothing but mothers—as of no present and individual value in themselves, but only in reference to the future and to others—yet the best among them prize the instinctive love which men bear for them when they hold a child in their arms, and repeat, each in her turn, the divine hope of Mary. They feel then that they are very precious in the eyes of men—lovely and

holy too ; and all the more because of St. John's animosity was Brother Gilbert's sympathy with her maternal love dear and grateful to Isola. Yes, the child that was neither his nor hers was a link between them as real as if it had been his or hers ; for is not the spiritual life as true as the natural, and is not love a fact, call it by what name you will ?

CHAPTER III.

“QUIETNESS.”

It was an immense relief to Isola that St. John was taken from the house for a certain number of hours in the day. She had leisure now, and what is more valuable than leisure, an uninterrupted manner of life, and duties that did not clash and cross.

“Minding baby” took up a great deal of time no doubt; but now that she was free to organize her life as she chose, it did not take up all her time. A young girl came to tend him under her immediate superintendence, and while they played, Isola did pretty fancy-work—embroidery and bead pomegranates, like the things at which

Jane had once scoffed so unmercifully, but at which she scoffed no longer; for they were now useful and represented so much income—she disposing of them for her cousin by certain mysterious methods in her power, and not detailed to the worker.

This was all that Isola could do towards filling the gaping void of the family purse. She was not a woman of trained intellect, and could not have taken up literature as a profession as Jane had done. I doubt if she could have written a novel, given bigamy, murder, and suicide as the triple basis, or even a bit of goody-goody vapidness fit for village schools. She could have been a daily governess, and if her fancy work failed she would try for something of the kind; but her teaching would be of the unsatisfactory kind of one who had never been taught to teach, and she preferred work of a lower range which kept her at home and near her baby. She was not particularly well-educated in anything; and as she had married so early, and had not been allowed to pursue any kind of subject steadily, she could

not possibly be proficient in knowledge, however capable of acquiring it. But she was not intellectual so much as purposeful—with more strength of character than keenness of wits. She could not write prose nor poetry, but she could accept poverty cheerfully; and though she could not paint above the level of a school-girl's pains-taking inanity, she could make the best of ill by her noble bravery and sweetness. For her speciality she was eminently handy—with what the Americans call “faculty”—and could do needlework which was in itself an art.

And as Jane said very truly, “A speciality, Isola, is worth far more than any amount of general talent. If you could make pincushions better than any one else, it would be a more honourable and profitable business for you than writing second-rate novels or third-rate plays. For all that pincushion-making is a bad trade compared with literature, and the best sempstress in England is not to be named, of course, in the same breath with the best writer. But the world wants specialities nowadays. That was what

Wyndham said to me, I remember, when I first saw him, and I took up his words as a great truth, and have thought of them ever since."

"I *ought* to make more money than I do," said Isola, "but I am quite content to do the best I can. Fretting only weakens one's powers; even fretting over one's own shortcomings."

"Fretting is the resource of weakness and cowardice," said Jane very gravely. "You are far more useful for what you can do, Isola, and for your dear good temper and brave-heartedness, than if you were twice as clever as you call it, and went in for all sorts of sublimities."

Saying which, Jane Osborn did what she had never done before—bent her rugged face towards her cousin's, and kissed the rounder, fairer cheek affectionately. Then she left the room hastily, a little troubled at her own impulsiveness, and calling herself a donkey half-a-dozen times during the next half hour.

"If I am going to develop into that sort of thing, I might as well shut up shop at once," she said contemptuously to herself. "What in the

name of fortune made me do such a foolish thing! But Isola is such a trump, anybody might kiss her. And then, as she is not a fool, and knows that I hate the kind of thing, she won't try it on again as a stupid dossy woman would. She'll take it just for what it was worth—a surprise.”

If Jane had been a pretty young girl caught under the misseltoe, and startled into a confessional kiss, she could not have been more annoyed and ashamed than she was at simply touching her cousin's face, women as they both were together. She was not far out in calling herself a queer wretch! She was decidedly queer!

So now, what with Isola's work and St. John's occupation, and the gains of the one and the salary to come of the other, and the wholesome separation during the day, there was a little cessation of the grinding misery following on the first of their fall; and life for the next few weeks flowed easily enough. At least to Isola; who was happier in their poverty, with the activity and purpose of her life and that beloved child at her feet, than she had been when stifled

under the luxury and idleness of 200, Hyde Park Square, doing no good to any one, and simply dying spiritually of ease and inactivity.

Poor St. John was by no means on the same platform of content. For the first time in his life he was a working man, and for the first time since boyhood under the control of his superiors. His work was what hundreds of men would have held themselves fortunate to have obtained; but St. John was not like other men, and what suited them but ill-mated him. To him this secretaryship was simple humiliation, from which he could get nothing but heart-burning and social shame; and instead of taking comfort from the knowledge that he was doing the only thing possible to an honest man, he felt that he was degraded, and that his future was destroyed for ever. It was just what such a man would feel—sensitive, proud, and not self-reliant—simply propped up by conventional supports, and when those were withdrawn collapsing.

For a time he went to his office steadily enough, making no complaints but taking no

interest in what he did—not even the interest of a man working himself clear of a coil, and providing for his house. He was more silent and gloomy than ever, spending the evening in the easy-chair set straight before the fire-place, looking into the empty hearth mournfully, and neither reading nor speaking. Nothing could enliven him, nor relax the tight-drawn muscles of his mouth, nor raise the knitted lowering brow; nothing could make him pleased with in his present life, nor see the slightest good nor use nor beauty about him.

The room was really very tolerable now, even for a fastidious taste like his. Isola's hand had been over it, and what with rejection and selection, and the “faculty of pincushion-making,” as she called it, the place was such as did no discredit to a gentlewoman. Of course it was not rich, but it was clean, and it was not unpicturesque. But St. John saw no change; and when she asked him if it did not look better, only answered gloomily; “Better, Isola! Can there be anything better in a hovel like this?”

The food too was improved. By the aid of a cookery-book and common sense Isola had bungled through the first failures into really very tolerable proficiency ; and St. John's dinners and breakfasts in these latter days were by no means badly prepared, and not nearly so awkwardly served. But she had to keep the fact of her kitchen industry a profound secret. It would have wanted but the knowledge of that, and the pincushions, to have completed poor St. John's shame. So she said nothing about either circumstance ; and her husband neither noticed the better condition of the table, nor asked how she managed to keep house without money. He was too miserable to be pleased by the one, or to trouble himself about the other. His own wreck was his only anguish ; and if he thought of Isola at all, it was as his wife whose poverty was part of his shame, not as an independent existence suffering on her own account.

Never in their brightest days, when their marriage was young upon them and she loved him best, had Isola been so careful to avoid all causes

of offence as now—so diligent to seek all causes for pleasing. Yet alas! not for love; only for womanly pity, and the desire to lighten the burden of one who suffered;—but for the wife’s eager desire to please for the sake of her own love? No! never again! And the want was felt, and therefore her endeavours were left unthanked and passed by disregarded. Who can feel grateful for a cup of cold water when fainting for the rich fire of wine? Who cares for duty when famishing for love? Surely not the one who loves, and to whom is denied love in return!

If Isola dressed herself with studied care—if she spent hours over her husband’s meals, and his wardrobe, and his dressing-table, and his niceties—if she dusted the room with her own hands, and set it out with that indescribable air of attention to a superior which women can throw into the smallest circumstances of daily life—she did it because she knew that St. John lived in outside appearances, and cared more for the graces and prettinesses, as Jane called them, than for anything else; she did it to gratify his

tastes, and to prevent an outburst of temper ; but she did not do it because she loved him. It was a subtle difference of motive, but it was one which makes the severance or the union of married life. Fortunately she was just, and did not look for thanks not righteously earned. When her husband saw nothing to praise, and was pleased by nothing done for him with so much care and toil, she neither burst out into anger nor dissolved into tears. She knew that, judged by the standard of love, she deserved no thanks ; and she asked for none.

In the ordinary routine of life then, between them, she was patient, cheerful, unselfish, brave ; and he was sullen, irritable, and thankless. But in the unspoken life of the soul he loved her, and she did not love him. Could there be a sadder tragedy of the spiritual kind ?

One day he came home more gloomy than usual. He would not eat, he would not speak, nor even dress for dinner—the first time he had neglected that graceful little observance—but sat himself in his accustomed place before the

hearth, moodily gazing on vacancy. Isola tried to talk to him, but for the most part he would not answer her; once telling her more rudely than became the polished gentleman he was, to hold her tongue and not worry him.

“Do you want to drive me into the streets, Isola?—drive me to suicide?” he said fiercely, suddenly starting up and pacing the room with a dark look and quivering nostrils.

“No, I want you to be here with me, and happy,” she answered quietly.

“Happy!” he groaned. “My God! happy!”

He sat down in his chair again and covered his face with his hands.

She went up to him and put her arms about his neck, and laid her cool cheek against his burning forehead.

“Why not happy, dear?” she whispered. “Misfortunes are not crimes, and we have done no wrong. It is hard for you to have lost all your money and to be obliged to work; but oh, St. John! there are worse things in life than this, and this ought not to make either of us unhappy!”

He was silent. He did not care to be comforted in this way. If she would have flung herself at his feet, and have poured out a volume of love and loving flattery she would have soothed him; but the quiet strength of a companion did not help him. He wanted adulation not encouragement, the suppleness of a fond slave not the steadfast hand-grasp of an equal.

“Well! don’t preach!” was his only answer; “and take your cheek from my forehead; I am hot enough without that!”

But at the moment when he said these ungracious words he would have given all he possessed if she had kissed him again and again, in defiance of what would have been his pettish refusals wanting only to be coerced—or if she would have wept at his unkindness, and broken to pieces in his hand. She did neither. She simply obeyed him, as of course; and taking her work seated herself by the window and went on with her embroidery in silence; accepting patiently, as her duty to accept, what he wanted her to refuse by the sweeter disobedience of love.

Then, when he got more irritable still against her, she, knowing nothing of the secret wound she had inflicted, wondered at his unkindness and felt oppressed by his sullen humour. She was getting to dread the time of his return home ; and he, whose heart throbbed like a young lover's when they met, was daily alienating hers more and more by the moroseness and miserable temper which were the bitter exponents of his most bitter want. If she could have loved him as she once loved, or if he could have made himself amiable and conciliating, things would have gone well ; but love with her went with respect, and love with him did not teach loveliness ; and so there was no union between them, and none likely, as things went.

Soon after this the boy's voice was heard downstairs calling lustily for “mam ! mam !” Isola left the room and ran down hurriedly. It was to try and still him before he had annoyed her husband too much by his cries ; but St. John thought it was in eagerness to get away from him. It was the little fellow's bedtime now, and

Isola had to bring him upstairs for the pleasant task of undressing and bathing; and when St. John heard her voice through the folding doors crooning nursery songs and talking the sublime nonsense of a loving mother, his heart seemed to grow cold within him like the heart of a dying man; and his head burned, till he felt that he had no power over his thoughts.

“If it would but die!” he kept saying to himself, as if it was the burden of a song he was repeating. “If it would but die!”

Then he got up and walked about the room, still repeating, “If it would but die!” with a kind of prayerful passion in his voice and at his heart, as if the very force of his desire could bring down the death he asked for.

He would care for nothing if but that child would die, he thought. Poverty, Jane Osborn, the humiliation of his work—all he could accept cheerfully as things unpleasant in themselves but not impossible to be borne, if only he was freed from the hateful sight of a creature with which was associated every ill and anguish of his

life—that creature which Isola loved better than himself, and which she cherished with such passionate warmth, while to him so cold and so lost!

He knew now where the sting lay—where was the poison on the sharp arrow of his fortune: it was the child—the low-born son of a drunken wretch to whom was owing his sister’s degradation and ruin. Good heavens! and his wife—his property—cherished this beggar’s brat like her own, and would not let it go though it sent him mad! What had he to do with it? what was it to him? Ruined as he was, how could he be asked to maintain a pauper’s child whose fitting home was the workhouse? Let it go to the workhouse and rot there; or let it die here in Isola’s arms, so that he was freed from it for ever—yes, let it go to the workhouse and rot there; or let it die in Isola’s arms, he repeated half aloud. He was the master; he would be obeyed in this as in other things, and if not in one way then by another; if she would not give it up for duty, then she should be made to do so by force. By what form of force?

So he thought and thought, wandering restlessly about the room, muttering in broken undertones, and lashing himself to madness as he was wont to do by his thoughts. Then he sat himself down as before and covered his face in his hands again, thinking. Soon after he took up his hat and went out ; but stealthily, so that Isola should neither see nor hear him. And when he had got into Oxford Street, he turned into a chemist's shop and bought a small phial of dark thick liquid, labelled Poison.

It was a very simple purchase ; merely four-pennyworth of laudanum—good for toothache, cough, and sleeplessness—a purchase for which he had no present special use, but which gave him a strange feeling of secret power that would enable him to bear his burden better because enabling him to throw it off when it might suit him. As he fingered that small rough phial in his pocket, it was as if he was a magician handling his talisman. It put him on good terms with himself, because giving him the free choice of generosity or self-assertion, while breaking

through the thralldom of enforced submission to circumstances. It changed the whole aspect of his life for the moment, and made him feel quite light-hearted and as he had not felt for months—long weary months now! He could even joke and laugh when he reached home again—with a feverish kind of gaiety truly; but it was a relief from the deathly gloom of the last few weeks, to see him even feverishly gay: and Harvey, who had “dropped in,” as he did sometimes in an evening, wondered to himself what had been Aylott’s little game in the city; and was inclined to be jealous at the thought that he could have fallen on a good thing without his pilotage—and wreckage.

And St. John, when the literary handy-man and city speculator taxed him, half in jest and half in earnest, with stealing a march on him somehow, only laughed in a meaning way and said, “Perhaps I have stumbled upon El Dorado at last, Wyndham, who knows?—or if not quite on El Dorado, perhaps I have found the gate of my prison and have the key that could open it in my pocket.”

"I congratulate you if you have," said Harvey jauntily. "All I can say is, I wish I had the key of mine on my bunch! And where have you found your 'Open Sesame,' Aylott?"

"Where? oh! that is my secret," he answered.

Just then came Isola's voice, singing a low sweet song to hush the baby who had awakened again, and was tossing about fretfully. The folding-doors between the rooms did not shut very close, and her lullaby was distinctly heard by both St. John and Harvey Wyndham.

"That b flat was well sustained," said Harvey critically. "La, le, la, lo—la, le, la, lo—very good indeed! A nice little motif and a fresh sympathetic voice! I say, St. John—have you a key there?—in that voice I mean?"

"I do not understand you," answered St. John.

"Oh come! nonsense! There is nothing so difficult in my question. Holding, as I do, that it is an absolute duty we owe to ourselves to make the most of every faculty we have, I think you would be only acting as every sane man

should act, if you turned Mrs. Aylott's voice to good account. And her beauty would carry weight too. The public like beauty: it draws nearly as well as talent. And if her characters were judiciously selected—she would be the rage!”

“I cannot follow you, Wyndham,” said St. John putting his hand to his head. “I must be growing stupid, but upon my life I do not understand you!”

“Well, I mean this,” said Harvey swaggeringly—what were the poor gentleman's susceptibilities to him? It was all a matter of business, and if he did not quite relish the idea of Isola becoming an opera singer, why he must learn to relish it, that's all. Even the thinnest skins get used in time to rubs!—he thought to himself, while he spoke in his ringing metallic voice pitched high and sharp; “I mean this—if I had such a wife as Mrs. Aylott, with such a voice and face—”

“If you had such a wife—and what the devil's that to me!” broke out St. John violently.

“ You and that fellow Holmes are always boring at me with what you would do if you were me. What do I care what you would do ? What is it to me ? I tell you, Wyndham, this kind of thing won’t do with me ! Men that I would have wiped my feet on—that I would not have had inside my house a year ago—to be continually at me, advising here and advising there, and tutoring me as if I was a boy. I won’t stand it any longer ! not if I have to shoot the whole lot of you like dogs ! ”

He got up from his chair, and flung a book that was on the table from one end of the room to the other. His eyes were wild, and his face was livid and convulsed : he was evidently no longer master of himself, and was not to be held accountable for his actions.

“ He is mad or drunk,” said Harvey to himself, watching him quietly. “ Poor beggar ! I will not be hard on him. He has had enough to upset a stronger head than his, and I can afford to let him rave.”

St. John’s loud voice and noisy movements

frightened the child, who, in spite of Isola's tender hushing, broke out into a storm of cries against which even Harvey stopped his ears, while the other halted in his wild pacing round the room, and listened. He became quite calm suddenly ; and not only calm but smiling—almost compassionate. The change was as rapid as a stage transformation, and struck Harvey as one of the most singular things he had ever seen.

St. John opened the folding doors.

“ Go and call Miss Osborn, Isola,” he said in a quiet voice—but why was that strange smile on his lips and that red glare in his sidelong eyes ? “ She may be able to quiet the boy. The noise you know is unbearable. Go and call her at once ; he won't take any harm in the time.”

“ I am so sorry for you, dear ! ” answered Isola, so glad of this glimpse of better feeling. “ I cannot think what is the matter with the poor little fellow to-night.”

“ Well, go for your cousin,” said St. John a little impatiently ; “ You cannot expect me to bear this hideous riot ! ”

“No! no! I do not!—I will go,” said Isola reluctantly; while the baby, seeing her move away from the cot, broke out into a fresh yell.

“Never mind him—I will see he does not take any harm—do you go for your cousin,” repeated St. John, almost pushing her out of the room.

He closed the door after her, and with one stride was by the baby’s side. He took the rough little phial out of his pocket, drew the cork with his teeth, held back the child’s head with one hand, and with the other put the phial to the open lips——

“Excuse me, Aylott,” said Harvey Wyndham, stretching his hand in between, and quietly taking the bottle from him. “You know I was a medical student once—let me just see that soothing syrup of yours. Good thing in its way; but they make it so deuced strong sometimes;—‘quietness’ the old wives call it—and so it is with a vengeance! Ah! just as I suspected! nine-tenths laudanum—pure opium in fact! Gad! you would not have been troubled again with the little imp’s squalling if he had

swallowed this ! You see the value of having an experienced man at your elbow sometimes ?” laughing lightly, and recorking the bottle. “ I must explain to Mrs. Aylott the proper dose of so strong a preparation as this ; or perhaps I had better not say anything to her at all, hey ? Wives don’t like their husbands interfering about the babies ; and physicking the curly-headed scamps is half the charm of the nursery ; so we’ll not speak about it, I think ; only don’t try your hand at soothing syrup again !—at least you won’t, if you take my advice.”

He spoke so naturally, just as if he was giving an ordinary piece of medical counsel, no more, that St. John, who had the superstition common to secret men and children, that they are not seen through, took him at his own showing and believed—just what Harvey meant him to believe.

“ I had no idea it was so strong,” he said meditatively. “ We had better fling it away, for fear Mrs. Aylott should get hold of it. These strong sedatives are dangerous where there are children.”

“Very,” said Harvey. “So I’ll fling it away,” pocketing the phial. And then Isola and Jane came into the room, and St. John’s chance was over, and his talisman was destroyed.

Years after when Jane came to know that anecdote, she confessed to a strange eerie sensation when Isola came to her by St. John’s wish to help in quieting the child. It was all too strange, she thought at the time, to be right somehow; but though she did not think the wretched creature would have gone so far as this, she did think that something was amiss, and that St. John was either mad or after mischief to send such a message. And it turned out that he was both, she used to say.

Nothing however was said or done now to rouse suspicion with any one. St. John, turning to Harvey, merely said, in a natural tone of voice—but he kept his head turned away and his eyes persistently lowered—“Come, Wyndham, let us go out, I cannot stand this any longer. It goes through my brain!”

And Harvey answered, “All right! With due

deference to Mrs. Aylott I have no predilection for crying infants myself, and would rather march up to a cannon's mouth than into a nursery in an uproar; though I like the little rogues dearly when they are jolly, and hold them first-rate inventions.”

Jane looked at him when he spoke. Then flinging back her hair and rubbing her nose, she said in her roughest voice; “When you take to baby-jumpers and that kind of thing tell me Wyndham, will you? and then I shall know where I am with you”—much as if she had said, “When you take to forgery or shoplifting, let me know; that I may give you a wide berth and keep my hands clean from your touch.”

After which the two men went out, and Jane went downstairs again, to send up mamma in her stead, as more used to squalling babies than she was—if Isola wanted help, which she didn't.

“Good Lord!” said Jane Osborn with a tremendous snort; “a baby's not a wild bull!—you don't want a regiment of women about it because it cries!”

“No, my dear Jane, but you want experience,” said Mrs. Osborn, letting the milk, which was to be simply warmed, boil over and burn.

“And that ain’t very like experience !” snapped Jane in a fume, taking the pipkin from her hand roughly, and heating the milk herself.

In two hours after this St. John Aylott came home for the first time in his life, drunk.

“Isola, what happened last night ?” he said at breakfast—the breakfast that was a mockery to him and a humiliation to her. “What was that about Harvey Wyndham, and the child, and the bottle ? I cannot remember anything—my head gets so confused ; but what was it all ?”

“I do not know what you mean,” she answered, not looking at him.

“Did not I insult Wyndham ?” he asked again.

“I am sure I do not know,” she replied, in her heart wishing that he had done so. “You went out about nine o’clock and I don’t know what happened then.”

“No, it was before. I have a vague recollection of something, I scarcely know what : a

quarrel, and a great noise ; the—there ! never mind !—if you don’t remember it does not signify. Perhaps it was all a dream.”

“ Perhaps it was,” said Isola, thinking that his confusion of memory was simply owing to his state last night ; and so not regarding it as worth attention any way.

Again St. John put his hand to his head.

“ I am not right,” he said fretfully. “ There is something I cannot make out !”

“ You look very ill,” she answered, meaning to be stern ; but when she saw the haggard face and bloodshot eyes her heart melted, and she went up to him, and kissed him. “ Do not get into *these* habits, darling !” she said affectionately. “ If you do—we had better all die, for then we shall be ruined indeed !”

“ I am ashamed of myself, Isola,” he said with pathetic self-abasement. “ Forgive me this once and it shall not happen again.”

“ It is not for me to forgive you, darling—it is for yourself !” she answered.

“ No, it is for you. It was an ungentlemanlike

blackguard thing to do, and I who have had always had such a horror of the kind of thing I cannot imagine how I was led into it last night. I do not remember drinking much. The fact is I remember nothing of yesterday evening at all. I had been worried at the office, I know; and I know no more—but it shall not happen again, Isola! Whatever comes, I trust I shall never cease to be a gentleman,” he added proudly.

“You are that—you cannot change your nature,” said Isola fervently.

He smiled, a pale wan smile. “So you give me credit for that virtue?” he asked, looking up into her face beseechingly.

“And for many more, dear, if you would only—” she stopped.

“Only, what?” he said a little petulantly.

“Give them fair play,” said Isola.

“Which simply means, do exactly as you like, and have no will of my own in anything,” said St. John coldly.

“No! no! I am not such a tyrant!” she answered pleasantly. “I only want what is best

for you—and best, according to God’s law and right,” in a lower voice.

“I believe you mean to be a good girl, Isola,” said St. John after a pause. “I do not think you have been improving of late, but that is merely from the influence of this vile woman here. It will all come right when I have you to myself again. But I do believe that you mean well, and that when you do wrong you do not do it intentionally.”

“Indeed! I only wish to do what is right,” said Isola putting her hand in his.

“And you would, Isola, if you would be less masculine—less self-willed and more obedient. It is folly for a woman to think that she can live independent of her husband. How can she be doing right when she fails in the first duty of a wife, which is obedience?”

Isola made no reply; she dared not touch on that subject; and then St. John, annoyed that she did not answer, and, always seeking to break her down into the old girlish submission again, ever pained and aggrieved when he could not do

so, shut up his heart against her, and went out—no longer penitent for his own misdeeds, but only irritated against her for her self-will.

It was a great misfortune to Isola that she had that kind of spiritual honesty which would not let her feign even for peace' sake. Suppleness and apparent submission would have got her through the bad hours of life so much more easily!—and such men as St. John Aylott do not prize that steadfast honesty in women—that inability to act a falsehood even by silence. They prefer the fluid softness of affection and the plastic grace of obedience, and condemn as unwomanly the internal anchorage which allows of no drifting into the pleasant waters of peace through submission. The theory is by no means clear yet to some others, beside men like St. John Aylott; the world not having settled to its full satisfaction the sex of all the virtues, and whether a woman's guardian angel is truth or love—the honesty that will not feign or the humility that does not assert.

CHAPTER IV.

NEWFIELD FRUITS.

THOUGH Marcy missed the Aylotts when they first left Newfield, yet she soon learned to forget them, and to give away to others such portion of the moral froth she called her affections, as she had hitherto assigned to them. Some new people took the Hermitage—nice pleasant people, with lots of well-mannered sons and good-natured daughters, and an elasticity in the matter of gentlemen-visitors perfectly amazing—a well-conditioned, well-to-do, thoroughly jolly family, who played croquet divinely and were first-rate archers, and up in every new game—and every old one too for that matter—and who took life as one long

summer's day, with the disagreeable possibility of night and a narrow box at the end of some centuries say—not sooner. They were people after Marcy's own heart, and she fraternized with them accordingly.

Inconsequent and selfish, the present was her only life and pleasure her only good; and as the Montague Wards ministered very greatly to her pleasure, they were therefore her dearest friends, and distanced all the others. Even Rosa—poor, meek, long-suffering Rosa—got more than her usual allowance of snubbing from her former friend and patronizing confidante; and as for Mr. and Mrs. Joyce, they found things rather different at the Hall now, to what they had been when the dear old man was alive and made them welcome. Now it was a chance if they saw Marcy at all when they called; and if she was obliged to own herself at home, she was sure to be surrounded by the Ward family, and to make the Joyces feel intruders. She was paying off her old score of boredom; and Marcy Tremouille could calculate moral interest. For which causes there was a great

deal of discontent at the Vicarage in spite of the turtle-dovehood of its inmates, and Rosa's life was not quite of the brightest.

Unfortunately for herself too she was rather "touched" with the handsomest and merriest of the young Montague Wards—the one whom Marcy most affected; and even such shadowy interference as Rosa Varley's facile preference was quite enough to anger the Newfield heiress who, for want of rivalry, had grown to think herself a kind of queen divinely circumstanced, whose will was to be law throughout her own small world. Poor Rosa never knew what mischief Marcy did her at the Hermitage, nor how she nipped in the bud a nascent fancy that might have grown into a sufficing love, in another young man, whom she could have loved in return with exemplary perseverance, by telling of her silly passion for Harvey Wyndham; making it appear that Rosa had all but offered herself to the literary handy-man, and had been ignominiously refused: which, being a bit of pre-nuptial history no man exactly covets to endorse, Rosa's chance with

young Charles Legge was lost ; and there was one happy home the less in England for Marcy Tremouille's jealous vanity. Poor Rosa ! it was a cruel thing to do, for she would have made Charles Legge a good and careful wife, Harvey, Montague Ward, and others notwithstanding. These little wayside fancies were nothing but the drippings of a cup overfilled ; and to the man who might love her she would be as faithful and as fond as if just taken out of a nunnery and married to a prince in a fairy tale—like Isola.

Marcy had arranged her home affairs with great ability. She had engaged as her chaperone a certain Mrs. MacHugh, a pretty, dewy-eyed, well-preserved little woman of about forty or so, friskily inclined, but perfectly well-bred and admirably dressed ; whose husband, a slightly apocryphal person in the Indian army, was apparently not fond of letter-writing. For during the four months that she had been now at the Hall, she had not received one letter from My Major, as she called him when she spoke of him—which was not often—neither had she written

one. But people are very odd about letter-writing, and perhaps Mrs. MacHugh and her Major were all the better friends because of their reserve.

Her chaperone's postal peculiarities or matrimonial arrangements were nothing to Marcy. She had come armed with first-rate testimonials, and as she was good-natured and full of fun, understood the lines of a flirtation as well as she understood the fashion-book, and bore herself with unfailing complaisance to the young heiress, they got on very well together; and Marcy congratulated herself on her choice, and Mrs. MacHugh congratulated herself on her chance—which was a frame of mind eminently satisfactory to both.

Nine months of her year of mourning having now expired, and the Montague Wards having become a little stale, more especially since the young men had vanished one by one to their respective colleges, barrack-yards, and quarter-decks, Marcy's thoughts turned, where they had so often turned before, to London and the mysterious pleasures hidden there. A life in London

had always seemed to her the highest point of human felicity attainable, and she yearned for the time when this felicity should be hers.

To be sure she had no relations with what is called society there, but Mrs. MacHugh had as many friends as there are days in the year—she used to mark them off in her pocket-book, one for each day; and she was young, beautiful, and had two thousand a-year: on which three pleas she thought that society would not be difficult to her, and that house-doors would open with oiled hinges. And then she knew the Aylotts and cousin Gilbert, and that tiresome Harvey Wyndham, with his fetch-and-carry kind of good nature, and his bushy black beard like a Jew's. So she came up to London at the end of September, knowing nothing of times and seasons peculiar to the metropolis, and disdaining her chaperone's better judgment. London was as much London in September as in May to Marcy; and the brighter the sun in the garden the brighter it would be in the parks, and the more ardently her young blood craved for its excitements and pleasures.

If the Aylotts had passed out of her heart as the Montague Wards passed in, she remembered them again when likely to be of use to her. Granting that St. John had been so silly as to ruin himself—great stupid fellow! she used to say to Mrs. MacHugh pettishly—and so could not give balls and parties in her honour, nor introduce her to barons and earls, yet he and Isola could go about with her if she wanted companions in the sight-seeing which every country visitor must go through. And as Isola always looked nice, and St. John was handsome and gentlemanlike, they would do as well as any other—cousin Gilbert, she supposed, not being always attainable.

It was strange how her thoughts always went back to this cousin Gilbert who used to talk so gravely and reprovably to her, and who could never be flattered or petted into complaisance like any one else. She used to declare that she hated him; but she never let a week pass without making some excuse to write to him, wanting his advice about all sorts of things, and professing herself quite unable to do without his guidance.

Mrs. MacHugh had a mortal dread of this formidable cousin of hers, and set him down as an artful angler waiting only the fitting moment for the landing-net and everlasting captivity. He was her rival and her enemy, and she gave herself much useless trouble in thinking how she could take the wind out of his sails to fill her own—spending many an anxious hour in scheming the destruction of this artful angler's landing-net; while he was answering Marcy's letters all in good faith, wishing sincerely that the poor girl had a good husband to take care of her, and wondering which of her friends would be the best suited to her. He certainly never thought of himself; but he was afraid of Harvey Wyndham; and often said to himself that he hoped the poor child would be saved from that pitfall. He knew Harvey's character by this time, and knowledge had not brought respect.

Marcy had not been many hours in London before she called on the Aylotts. Isola was at home alone, and the well-appointed heiress did not care to conceal her surprise at the changed

conditions in which she found her. She herself came in all the grandeur and perfectness belonging of right to two thousand a year and a pretty face. At the door stood her prancing bays and dark-blue carriage, with the silver-plated harness, and the blue and silver livery—now black and silver for mourning—all of which Isola knew so well. She was exquisitely dressed, with the most coquettish admixture of foamy white and shadowy black possible to half-mourning not made too severe—redolent with perfumes—glittering with jet and silver—the whole atmosphere about her one of luxury and lavish expenditure; and as she flashed into that dingy room in Seymour Street, she produced somewhat the effect of a silver pheasant among barndoor fowl, or a diamond set side by side with clouded pebble.

There was no denying the fact that Seymour Street was dingy; that the furniture was shabby and scanty; that there was the striking absence of all ornamentation costing money, which is just as eloquent of poverty as the positive presence of darned carpets and faded curtains; and

that the whole thing was even below mediocrity and beneath the level of the second-rate.

Isola was as beautiful as ever, but she too bore the stamp of poverty as plainly as the rest. No longer in diaphanous muslins or glittering silks, but in a plain grey "useful stuff" of a kind which no one but a moneyless woman would wear—her curling hair as full of varying shades and gracious ripples as ever, but without the velvet bands that had looked so well among the gold—her noble face both thinner and more earnest, and her dark blue eyes looking larger, bluer, and sadder than of old—she sat at her embroidery, working, not playing at work—working for the actual necessities of life, not to while away an idle hour. The child was on the carpet at her feet; the pretty foppery of white frocks and blue bows laid aside for a rather coarse mud-coloured blouse that would not show the London dirt too quickly, and that cost but little trouble to wash. There were broken penny toys, torn picture books, and strips of gay-coloured chintz as playthings on the carpet; and there were various evidences of house-

hold cares about. For though the room was neatly kept in all save the actual work or business on hand, it would have been mere pedantry to affect any stateliness of order where a child was living, where the whole business of the day was carried on, and where no money could be spared for beauty in any shape. And as Isola understood her capabilities—a somewhat rare form of wisdom—she did not waste her strength in attempting what was impossible.

Mrs. Osborn and Jane both chanced to be in the room with Isola when Marcy came, and perhaps they made the general poverty more apparent by their own special evidence of it; for Mrs. Osborn with all her natural neatness and coquetry was very shabby just now, poor soul—the Aylotts being by no means profitable tenants; indeed their stay having as yet been a rather heavy loss to the widow—while Jane was if possible more untidy, more slipshod, more unkempt than ever, more defiant of ordinary rules, more careless of ordinary observances. As time and work went on, and her natural masculine self-

reliance became more confirmed, what little amount of feminality she ever possessed was gradually hardening and drying up in her ; and while really grand in some aspects of her character—really noble and heroic—she was irritating by her unwomanly want of all mental grace or beauty.

“Dear Isola !” said Marcy with the naïvest pity on her face and in her voice. “How sorry I am to see you like this !”

“Like what ?” said Isola, rising and kissing her. “I am very glad to see you, Marcy.”

“Yes, of course, and so am I glad to see you for yourself you know—but like this !”

“Like this again !” laughed Isola. “Why do you pity me so much, Marcy ? I am very happy I assure you. I am not to be pitied for anything.”

“Oh, Isola, how can you tell such stories and talk such nonsense !” said Marcy with her manner of childish truth “not to be pitied ?”

She looked round the room deliberately, and Isola saw her sleepy eyes resting on every stain and fracture and darn and make-shift ; then she

turned them on the child, who had sat down on the floor, and was sedately staring at her, uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

“Is your only idea of happiness fine clothes and good furniture?” asked Jane abruptly.

“My dear Jane! what manners!” whispered her mother.

“No, but I should not like to be poor,” lisped Marcy.

“Poverty has its pleasures I can assure you!” sniffed Jane, tossing back her hair.

Marcy put on a wondering helpless look as she turned appealingly to Isola.

“Well, Jane, I do not like to contradict you, and you my own child, but I must say I have never exactly found the pleasures in poverty you speak of. I think I should agree with this lady, and prefer those of wealth instead,” said Mrs. Osborn in her finest voice. “At least I know that is my recollection; and I have known both conditions,” with a sigh.

“Then you think, mamma, that every one in a silk gown has the right to pity you because

you wear a stuff one?—every one in a carriage may think you a miserable creature because you have to walk, or to take a threepenny 'bus when you are tired, and perhaps have a butcher or a soldier for your companion?"

Marcy gave a little scream. "How dreadful!" she said. "Oh, Isola, you don't go in those horrid omnibuses, and sit by vulgar butchers and soldiers, do you?"

"Don't look so horrified, Marcy!" answered Isola. "If I had to go a long distance I should be obliged to take one, but I have not often to go farther than I can walk, and so I do not use them."

"I am sure St. John would never let you!" said Marcy quite vehemently. "The idea of such a thing!—a butcher and a soldier! I should die, Isola!"

"Well, if you could die for such a trifle, perhaps you had better do it," said Jane quite tranquilly.

Marcy flushed angrily and looked at Isola.

"You must not mind our stoic," said Isola laying her hand in Jane's. "She is privileged."

"You must remember, Jane, that every one does not understand you, and make allowances for you as kindly as your cousin Isola," said her mother severely.

"I have said nothing wrong," said Jane sturdily. "I only said, and I say again, if people are so frail they would die at having to ride in an omnibus between a butcher and a soldier, they had better die. For as there are so many worse things in life than this, they must just live in torture; and so the best thing for them would be to have done with all their pain and misery at once."

"But I have no pain and misery, and I would rather not die, nor yet go into an omnibus with butchers and common soldiers," said Marcy. "Every one need not do such things, and every one need not die who does not do them," with a triumphant logic that seemed to her unanswerable.

Jane sniffed in her most disdainful manner.

"That may be," she said; "but you will have troubles, I suppose, like anybody else?"

"I am sure I don't know," lisped Marcy. "I

suppose I shall, but I hope I shall not be poor for all that," twisting her bracelets and smiling.

"You don't know anything worse than poverty?" asked Jane sternly.

Again Marcy raised her sleepy eyes and looked deliberately round the room, and up and down poor Isola's working dress, and on the child in his coarse mud-coloured blouse, chosen not to show the London dirt, and to wash without much trouble of "getting up" afterwards.

"Nothing," she said quietly, when she had finished her survey.

"Well! it would be better certainly to lose all one's friends, and one's good name too, than to live in a badly-furnished room and wear coarse clothes. That is about what it would come to if your philosophy is correct!" said Jane contemptuously.

Marcy gave another little scream. "Philosophy!" she cried. "Goodness! do not take me for one of those dreadful strong-minded creatures who talk philosophy! I am a little goose, am I not, Isola? just a silly little child!"

“In some things!” laughed Isola good-naturedly.

“I don’t exactly see that is a thing to pride yourself on,” snapped Jane. “If life means anything it means progress and earnestness, and not contentedly going to sleep among the lotuses, and calling oneself a goose and a silly little child, as if that was a great honour.”

“But I don’t know what lotuses are, and I don’t go to sleep among them,” said Marcy with her simple air.

“Have you never read Tennyson, Marcy?” put in Isola to create a diversion.

“No; what is it, Isola? A novel?” she answered. “I think I have heard the name before; is it pretty? and does it end well? I hate novels that make one cry, don’t you? like that dreadful ‘Bride of Lammermoor.’ I remember crying for a whole day about that dear darling Edgar. Do you know, Isola, St. John has always reminded me of Edgar! That is one reason why I like him. But you are not like Lucy Ashton.”

“Heaven forbid!” said Isola, “I should not like to be such a poor boneless creature as that!”

“Boneless? what do you mean?” asked Marcy, “what was the matter with her? I did not know that she was deformed or anything: what an odd expression!”

“Heavens above—what a fool that girl is!” said Jane half aloud. “How in the name of fortune Isola managed to live among such a set of idiots I cannot understand. I only wonder that she is not as great an idiot herself from association.”

“My dear Jane, what are you muttering about?” said her mother with a little laugh.

“Groaning over the follies of the world, mamma,” said Jane with grim humour.

“Which is not a very profitable employment, my dear,” returned Mrs. Osborn; “unless you groan over your own follies the most, and amend them.”

“Yes,” said Marcy almost briskly, “that is the very thing! People find fault with every one but themselves; and perhaps those who find the

most fault with others had better begin by themselves."

"There, Jane!" said her mother triumphantly. She always rejoiced when any one put down that strong-headed daughter of hers: it made a kind of secret help to her, in the antagonism perpetually warring between them, and seemed to strengthen her hands somehow. And her hands in general were very weak!

"Perfectly true, mamma," was Jane's tranquil rejoinder, "but then you see it does no good to remind one of one's own rudeness, say, when one is rebuking another for selfishness or folly; the two things don't go together anyhow, and don't balance, do what you will. But I don't think we need talk philosophy here any longer," she added rubbing her nose.

"Philosophy again!" put in Marcy. "I think all the talking has been your scolding me!"

"Well, it won't do you any harm," said Jane composedly, "and may do you a little good—who knows? miracles are not impossible."

Saying which she took up the "little man"—

who yelled at her rough touch—to leave Isola freer with her friend, swept up a few toys, told mamma to bring down the saucepan and see to St. John's soup, as Isola was engaged; and left the room; followed obediently by her mother, who, in revenge, made her life a burden to her for the next five minutes or so by her not unfounded complaints of her behaviour.

“I could not help it, mamma, and I don't mind if I was rude!” Jane said at last. “I could not stand that affected idiotic bit of millinery sneering at Isola because she is poor. Isola! why she is a queen among women—a woman to go down on one's knees to!—and that mass of pomade and affectation to dare to pity her indeed!—no! I will never stand that, whoever it may be! so, mamma, you may just hold your tongue,” very brusquely, “for if it came over again I should say just the same.”

“Oh, Isola!” exclaimed Marcy as soon as the door was shut, “what an awful woman! what a dreadful creature! How can you bear her near you? It would kill me to be in the same house

with her ! And what an untidy frightful thing too !—just look at that hideous red hair of hers ; and did you see her feet and hands ? I would not have her for my housemaid ! And she called you Isola too !

“ No,” said Isola, “ she would not make a very good housemaid, but she does make a good daughter and a good friend. I cannot tell you, Marcy, what that girl’s unselfishness is like. She is one of the noblest and most generous creatures I have ever met with. And one forgives a little fault of manner for such virtues as these.”

“ She ought to be something good !” said Marcy disdainfully ; “ for of all the horrid disagreeable persons I have ever seen she is the most horrid and the most disagreeable. She is a perfect ogress, and I hope I shall never see her again. Now let us talk of something nice. She has quite spoiled my visit, horrid thing !”

“ Well ! tell me about these new people at the dear old Hermitage,” said Isola cheerfully ; “ and how do you like Mrs. MacHugh ? The last time I heard from you the new people had just come

and you were going to call the next day, and Mrs. MacHugh had been with you a month ; and you liked her very much so far."

" Oh, Isola, I am sure I have written to you since then !" cried Marcy. " Why that is four months ago !"

" Yes, about that time," Isola answered tranquilly. " But then I heard of you every now and then from your cousin."

Marcy looked conscious and gave a little laugh. " Do you often see cousin Gilbert ?" she asked, glancing up sharply.

" No, not often," Isola answered quietly ; " but whenever I have seen him of course I have asked after you."

" And what has he said ?" Marcy asked eagerly. " What did he ever say of me ?"

" That you were well and seemed very happy with your new friends, and had a better head for business than he expected."

" Did he say that ?" she exclaimed pettishly. " How funny of him ! and I am obliged to go to him for everything ! I am the greatest goose in

the world, and I don't know what I should do without cousin Gilbert. And then to say that I have a good head for business !" pouting.

"I assure you that was what he did say," repeated Isola tranquilly; not exactly understanding why the young heiress should be annoyed at what she herself would have accepted as a compliment. But then she was not at the back of Marcy Tremouille's tactics.

"Then I think it very unkind of him !" said Marcy colouring violently. "That is just like cousin Gilbert—great cross tiresome fellow !"

"Marcy !" remonstrated Isola.

At the moment she was stooping her head over her work so that she did not see the girl's face. She would have been rather startled if she had seen it; for it was not a pleasant face to look at for that one fleeting moment of jealousy and rage and the power of cruel-doing underneath its beauty.

"Well, so he is," she repeated more deliberately: "he behaves well to no one but to you, Isola."

“He has always behaved well to me,” said Isola gravely.

“Yes, I know,” was Marcy’s dry response. “When do you expect St. John home?” she then asked quickly. “I want so much to see him again! He was always so kind and nice to me—I liked him so much, and I think he liked me, good fellow!” all very innocently, almost childishly said; as if there had never been anything in her liking for this handsome young husband to have caused annoyance to even the most jealous wife.

“Yes, you were always good friends,” said Isola with a certain slight embarrassment of air.

“When will he be at home?” persisted Marcy. “Tell me, and then I can see if I can wait so long. I do want to see him so much! And see! I brought these peaches for him,” giving Isola a pretty basket of fruit and flowers that had been standing on the side-table filling the room with its delicious odour. “Mind, they are for him, Isola!—don’t be jealous, but I mean them for him specially.”

“Very well,” said Isola smiling. “But am I not to have one?—nor baby the very tiniest bit?”

“If you are very good,” said Marcy with forced playfulness.

“Well, I will be good then,” Isola answered with a playfulness not forced.

As she spoke steps were heard on the stairs, and St. John came into the room. He had a latch-key at Seymour Street, to avoid the disgust of the dirty servant opening the door for him: at Hyde Park Square he would have thought it an infraction of dignity not to be attended by butler and footman so soon as he entered the house. He came home before his usual time to-day, bringing Harvey with him: and the room was still unprepared.

Nothing is more embarrassing than the unexpected return of a person whose fastidiousness is cared for at the regular hour. All the little unsightlinesses of the day's work are diligently put away; tangles are smoothed out; things awry are laid straight; baby's toys are huddled

comfortably into the dark; ends of thread and snippets of muslin vanish from off the floor; tired faces are bathed for refreshment; roughened hair is sleeked and smoothed; the rust that clogs the great wheel of working life is carefully oiled and varnished over; and the loving hypocrisy of unruffled order is everywhere made manifest. But when the return is out of time and rule the whole thing is shifted out of gear, and the curtain is drawn up before the stage is swept and garnished.

St. John had never caught Isola unprepared before: consequently he had no idea that her days were not all as smooth and well-ordered as her evenings, and as the days when he remained at home and drove her out of the room, down to Jane's "den" or Mrs. Osborn's "snuggery," to do there the work he would not have brooked she should have done before him. He recoiled in a sort of horror at the comparative disorder of the room; at Isola's homely attire; at her work, with Marcy Tremouille, the rich and scented heiress sitting there to measure the depth to

which he and his had fallen ! For a moment his brain seemed to reel. Sensitive as he was on the score of appearances, it was a trial : and St. John was not the man to bear trials without flinching. And if by any chance she had heard of that other horrible disgrace of his !—if that terrible history of his mother had become known ! Marcy almost started as she caught the wild, sharp, suspicious glance that was her first greeting.

“ Ah, there you are ! ” she exclaimed rising and running towards him, holding out both her hands. “ I have been waiting for you such a time ! How glad I am to see you again ; but poor dear, how ill you look ! Oh, Isola ! how ill he is, and you never told me ! ”

“ He is better than he was, I am thankful to say,” said Isola looking at him.

“ *You* never thought me ill,” returned St. John, with a bitter emphasis.

The sight of Marcy seemed to have soured his blood again as in olden times, and the exaggerated sympathy of her address turned

him against the honester wife who did not use herself to the same.

“Oh, Isola ! you did not think him ill ?” remonstrated Marcy. “Why ! where were your eyes ?”

“With her heart away,” said St. John satirically.

“Oh naughty !” said Marcy holding up her forefinger against her.

“Am I not to be spoken to, Miss Tremouille ?” here said Harvey.

“Oh, Mr. Wyndham ! are you there ! I was so taken up with poor St. John and this naughty—naughty Issy ! this bad, cold, wicked little wife !”

“Yes, am I not wicked ?” laughed Isola with embarrassment, not knowing what else to say.

“And where was her heart ?” asked Marcy with enchanting simplicity. “With cousin Gilbert as it used to be ?”

Her word, apparently so thoughtless, struck St. John like a poisoned arrow.

“Yes, with cousin Gilbert as it used to be, I suppose,” he answered with a dark look.

Isola’s face flushed and quivered.

“No, come, St. John, I deny that! If Mrs. Aylott’s heart ever went astray it came here!” cried Harvey Wyndham striking his breast theatrically.

He spoke good-naturedly, and to make a diversion for the poor girl; and she felt his intention, and, much as she disliked him, was grateful to him for it. But before he left, he made her understand that he considered himself in her confidence, and that he was aware he had helped her out of a scrape—which was not a pleasant thing for a young wife, proud and pure like Isola, to be made to understand.

All this did not tend to soothe St. John. Annoyed in the first instance at seeing the room in less than its usual trim array and Isola in her “working dress;” and especially annoyed that Marcy of all people in the world should have found them with the seamy side of their poverty turned outermost; he was now secretly furious that any one should dare to couple the name of his wife with the name of any man living. He forgot that he himself had opened the door for this

questionable joke, and given Marcy's inconsiderate speech licence. Had he been angry at all, he should have been angry with himself; but as it was he was merely wrathful that the shaft should have been shot so closely home, as it seemed to him; and that Marcy should have said out so boldly the name he had thought of so often. The old madness of his blood began to rage in that silent gloomy way of his which only those who knew his face could read; as Isola. She read it well enough, and thought again as she looked at Marcy what she had often thought before, "Why does that girl make such mischief against me? Why is she such an enemy to me?"

After this the talk became more special between Marcy and St. John, Harvey being consequently left to Isola, who did not entertain him very brilliantly. Marcy crept close up to St. John as she used to do, and talked in a low voice so sweetly! so compassionately! but with just the finest, most unmistakable thread of condescension running through the staple of her man-

ner. Mad as she was for "conquests," she did not care quite so much that St. John should be in love with her, now that he was poor, as she had cared when he was rich. Wherefore, though still apparently the adoring Marcy of Newfield, there was just a dash of the superior landed proprietor to temper the sweeter suppleness; and St. John felt the change—as she intended he should.

"See what I have brought you!" she said after a time, going to the side-table and bringing the basket of fruit to St. John. "I picked all this with my own hands, St. John, and packed them up myself expressly for you. Are they not well done?" daintily stirring the moss and flowers in which the fruit was imbedded. She had neither picked nor packed, but falsehoods came easy to Marcy.

"Beautifully done!" said St. John. "What I should have expected from you."

"You good dear, what a pretty compliment!" cried Marcy with infantile delight. "No one says such pretty things to me now, St. John!"

“Don’t they ? then they have very bad taste,” said St. John.

“Let me try and cut out Aylott, Miss Tremouille,” said Harvey Wyndham, coming forward with his brisk, business-like, self-satisfied air.

“Oh ! you are such a dreadful creature !” laughed Marcy. “You would make love to any one—wouldn’t he, Isola ?”

“I am sure I don’t know,” Isola answered quickly.

“I have never been able to make love to you, Miss Tremouille,” said Harvey ruefully. “You were always so surrounded by adorers, there was no room for me. That fellow Holmes took the wind out of my sails, confound him !”

Marcy laughed and looked at him enticingly. Really he was very handsome after all ; and his bushy black beard was not so like a Jew’s when she came to examine it ; and he looked nicer here in London somehow than he used to look in the country ; and he was not such bad fun on the whole—waiting something better. So she began to play off a few pretty little coquetries

upon him, such as she had always on hand for any one who took her fancy. And Harvey, who was even more astute than herself, saw his advantage, and followed it up scientifically.

He knew the full value of appearing before Marcy as the fortunate man of the group—the man who had the mysterious power which lies in prosperity—who could minister to her pleasures—procure her special admissions here and desirable invitations there—show her what she ought to admire—take her to what she ought to see—be her obsequious attendant as before, if she liked ; but not because she was an advantage to him, only because, preferring to please her before all other things, he gave her his time and his influence, and the best of his tickets and the full run of his social powers. This was Harvey Wyndham's policy as things stood ; he was to make Marcy Tremouille understand that he could be of use to her in London, and that St. John and Gilbert Holmes could be of none.

“Like to go to the fruit show at the Horticultural, to-morrow ?” he asked suddenly, in the midst of a talk about the Newfield peaches.

“Oh yes!” cried Marcy with a rapid glance cast mentally at her pretty fête costume. “But how can I get there?”

“Oh! I’ll manage that,” said Harvey in his off-hand way. “I have the means of getting all sorts of tickets and things. I can pass you through, if you will allow me to accompany you at least to the door.”

“Why of course,” said Marcy. “How could I get on by myself, Mr. Wyndham? If you take me there you must come in too—unless Isola will come and chaperone me, as she used at Newfield. Do you remember, Isola, how you and cousin Gilbert used to play Darby and Joan, and take care of the young things?”

“No, I don’t remember that,” said Isola.

“I do, though!” laughed Marcy shrilly.

“It is not always quite convenient to remember everything in the past,” said St. John raising his lip.

“But will you come to-morrow, Isola dear, and take care of me?” reiterated Marcy.

“No, I cannot,” answered Isola rather shortly; and she forgot to add, “I thank you.”

“I can get you into the museums on closed days; and I have often boxes at the opera and theatres at my disposal—the opera is not open now though; but I have all manner of odd chances, which come only to a man in my position,” said Harvey Wyndham, pulling his black, bushy beard with an air; “and I shall be most happy, Miss Tremouille, to do what I can towards making your sojourn in London agreeable.”

“Thanks, I am sure, very much!” said Marcy radiantly.

She had two thousand a-year, and she never spared her purse when the question was of her pleasures or desires; but like many ladies with two thousand a-year, she would accept anything that was offered, and did not disdain the most minute economies at other people’s expense. Pleasures gratis, and pleasures not in the power of every person, were very grateful to the heiress; and Harvey, who had seen that odd little thread of meanness running through what looked like a lavish character, was justified in his calculations, and came out of the interview—a gainer.

When Marcy rose to go, St. John and Harvey both offered to take her to her carriage at the same moment, and the pretty possessor of Newfield Hall had to choose between them. How rapidly she summed up their various claims to her consideration! Harvey was the better dressed, but his legs were thick—St. John's coat was shabby, but he had the handsomer face and the more gentleman-like figure; Harvey had the power of pleasure—St. John was the better born; Harvey was a *parvenu* in luck's way—St. John was a gentleman out of favour with fortune. Marcy balanced all this in less time than it takes to tell, then, thinking that what is, is preferable to what has been, she accepted Harvey's arm, saying to St. John; "Oh! I will not give you that trouble, St. John dear. You have Isola to look after, and need not mind me!"

So saying she tripped downstairs with the literary handy-man; and St. John watching them jealously through the window saw Harvey assist her into her carriage, then, leaning against the door he saw him standing for a short time talking

to her familiarly, and then he saw him open the door again and get in himself.

They both looked up to the window and blew kisses as they drove away ; Marcy saying, " How dreadfully shabby everything about them is !— it is quite disgraceful !"—and Harvey answering, " Yes, I should have thought that Aylott would have had more pluck I must say. He has given up in a most contemptible manner—and with no one but himself to blame for anything that has happened."

After this visit, which Marcy did not renew, a notable change took place in St. John. He became shabby, gloomy, disordered, careless of his appearance, indifferent to all former niceties of habit ; at times gloomier than ever, at others breaking out into wild fits of gaiety, more like intoxication than mirth. He could not overcome the pain of being seen by Marcy in their poverty ; he exaggerated her tone of condescension, and made more than need be of Harvey Wyndham's assumed superiority and her preference of the man he once thought it something beneath his

dignity to know ; he made that visit a kind of tidemark by which to measure the extent to which the ebb of his fortunes had gone ; and when he marked off the space he sat down in despair, and lost even what small amount of strength and courage he had had.

CHAPTER V.

BROKEN ANCHORS.

It was a bright October morning, and office-time had come, but St. John still sat by the breakfast-table, making puzzles and fortifications of his bread crumbs.

"It is time to go, dear," said Isola, bringing him his hat and gloves.

"Thank you, you may take them away again; I am not going to the office to-day," he answered coldly.

"Not going! have you got leave of absence then?" she asked in a tone of surprise.

"No, I have no leave of absence; but I am not going all the same," was his reply.

“But dear St. John!” she expostulated. It was so serious a matter that she laid aside her habitual cautious silence.

“It is of no use finding fault with me, Isola,” he returned irritably. “I am not going there again. A man of my standing to be insulted by a set of fellows beneath me in every way—do you think I will put up with that?”

“But think for a moment!” said Isola. “Is it wise to take offence at what was not meant perhaps, when it is at the cost of your whole income?”

“Yes, of course it is all my fault!—of course I ought to bow and scrape and submit to any insults men like Holmes and his friends may choose to offer me!—of course I expect that you will find me to blame, Isola, and that whoever else may take a just view yours is sure to be harsh and unjust.”

“Indeed not that, St. John, but it is such a serious thing to throw away an office like this—and when they are so difficult to get too—that I was simply taken by surprise; that is all. What will you do then, if you give this up?”

“I do not know. I will see about it,” he answered reluctantly.

“See about it! Oh! how often and how long you said that before, dear, and nothing came! Would it not be better to keep this for a little time longer while you looked out for something else? At least it is a certainty.”

“You know nothing about it,” said St. John angrily. “You are talking nonsense, as you always do when you pretend to understand matters of business.”

“But if you have no money, how are we to live?” she insisted. “We are already deeply in debt to Jane and aunt Juliana; and though they are so generous and never speak of it, they cannot afford to keep us for nothing, St. John; and then there is the boy, poor darling—and children are always wanting some little thing—what are we to do, dear, if you will not keep your situations when you have them, but throw them up at the first annoyance?”

“Throw them up at the first annoyance, do I? and pray how do you know whether this is the

first or the fiftieth?" said St. John in a loud voice.

"I do not know, I only suppose there has been none before."

"Then you know nothing about it," he cried very angrily; "so perhaps you will be kind enough to hold your tongue, and leave the room—else I shall."

Full of sorrow—if the truth be told, full of sorrowful shame for the weakness of nature that could not bear the weight of any cross, however light, Isola went down to Jane to consult how this new trouble could be overcome. All her clever little contrivances of the nurse-girl and the fancy work, and the saucepan with St. John's soup, and the private cooking that went on—all her quiet hours of diligence and purpose that gave her almost happiness—were destroyed by this untoward resolve; and she sat down in Jane's den in despair, feeling more entirely ruined than she had hitherto felt, and not knowing how the liabilities of the present or of the future were to be met.

"Not going to the office?" cried Jane; "says

he'll give up his secretaryship because he's been insulted? Why the man's mad, Isola! stark, staring mad! There is no sanity in a thing like this, take it how you will; and he's just fit for Bedlam and no place else!"

"But it is not pleasant, Jane, for an elegant young man like that to be ordered about here and ordered about there like a lackey," put in Mrs. Osborn; "and I am sure I don't wonder at his giving up, poor dear! You don't know what it is, Jane, to come down in the world. I do," with a sigh, "and that makes me feel as I do for poor dear Mr. Aylott!"

"But every one has to put up with rubs in this world; and no one escapes scot-free—in work especially," said Jane, not so impatiently as usual. "You should have heard old Smith swear at me yesterday, though I know he likes me well enough, and that I suit him better than most of them—but he swore at me like a pick-pocket, for a mere nothing too!"

"Then Mr. Smith is a very horrid vulgar man," said Mrs. Osborn; "and no gentleman,

Jane, and so I've always thought! No gentleman ever swears, and certainly not before ladies—not to speak of *at* them—horrid fellow!”

“But if I can take such a thing patiently, why shouldn't St. John?” said Jane. “We are all in the same boat—”

“Oh, Jane, how I do wish you would not use such vulgar language!” put in her mother.

“—And neither St. John Aylott, nor I, nor any one, can have a way made express for us with Turkey carpets to walk on. Not going to the office because he thinks himself affronted! I never! I'll just go and talk to my gentleman and tell him what I think of him!”

“Now, Jane, do you do nothing of the sort, and keep where you are,” said Mrs. Osborn. “You are a good girl—very good—I am sure I have every reason to say so—but you do not understand poor dear St. John, and you had better not interfere. Take my word for it you will only make bad worse if you do.”

“No, I shall not, mamma!” said Jane tossing up her head.

“He will be very angry with you, dear,” Isola said, laying her hand on her arm.

“I don’t care if he is, so long as I can do any good. He won’t beat me; and I suppose he won’t beat you, Isola, instead of me; so I’ll go. Things are so bad, if he is going to be such a maniac as he threatens, that I cannot do any harm and I may do good by interfering.”

And with that she tramped upstairs, and flung herself into the drawing-room, without knocking.

“I do not want to disturb you, Mr. St. John,” she said rather graciously for her; “but Isola says you have given up your appointment.”

He started as she spoke, and looked at her with almost ferocious anger. Jane Osborn was the person with whom, of all in the world, he most dreaded and disliked anything like direct intercourse.

“Now don’t be vexed with me,” she continued kindly. “I dare say you think me very impertinent for interfering in what don’t concern me—”

"I do," said St. John Aylott distinctly enough.

"—But I love Isola like my own sister, and I thought that perhaps I might make you see things in the right light if I spoke to you about them."

"You are very kind, Miss Osborn, but do you know I am quite content with the light in which I see things already, and have no wish to see them by any other?" said St. John with his cold satirical smile.

"Perhaps not; but you are all in the dark if you have given up your appointment for a foolish bit of temper, I can tell you," retorted Jane. "It is so difficult to get a thing of this kind! Men knock about London for years and cannot get what fell into your mouth in a manner, without any exertion on your part. And now you are going to give it up with nothing to fall back upon! You mustn't do it, Mr. St. John—that's just the positive fact—you mustn't do it!"

"You are very kind for taking such an interest in my concerns, but really you must allow me to

know my own affairs the best," said St. John coldly.

"But there are Isola and the boy to think of as well as yourself," urged Jane.

"I was not aware that I had forgotten them," was his scornful reply.

"Come, Mr. St. John, I do not deserve these answers!" said Jane, not rudely so much as earnestly. "I have not intruded upon you from impertinence, but simply to see if I can be of use to you. I am not a very fine person in look or manner, and I know that you think me unfeminine and all that, but what does that signify? It is not a soft manner but a true heart that one wants—isn't it? The thing which binds men together is not the best form of address, or the correct way of standing and speaking, but truth and brotherliness and help and honesty—ain't it so, St. John Aylott?"

As she spoke she laid her hand upon his shoulder—he shrinking from her involuntarily—and looked him full in the face. Her large grey eyes were dark and bright with the warmth of

her emotion; her rugged face was rendered grand, if not beautiful, with the magnificence of truth and earnestness that was in it; the square brow looked more than ever powerful by the side of St. John's weaker oval; the head more massive; the jaw more full of energy and strength: she stood before him instinct with power and courageous purpose, looking straight into his face—while he, with his self-masking action and downcast eyes, turned half away from her sullen, angry, and retreating. They made a marvellous contrast, both in appearance and circumstances—she, the working woman, toiling and suffering, but ever with a firm-set purpose that could not be beaten back nor turned aside, and he, the high-bred gentleman, who would not bear the smallest burden, nor put his shoulder to the wheel with only so much energy of mind as to wish to set his fortunes straight.

“You know this kind of thing is lost on me,” said St. John coldly; “it belongs to a state of society in which I have no part, and where I do not wish to enter. Truth and sincerity and

all that may be very fine, Miss Osborn, but I have been used to the respect which gentlemen and ladies show to each other, and to consider interference in one's private affairs gross impertinence."

"And you cannot see below that?" asked Jane earnestly.

"I do not wish to see below it, if you mean by that submit to vulgar interference," answered St. John.

"And you will not let me talk with you of your plans and prospects?—you will not discuss this new resolution of yours before finally and irrevocably taken?"

"Certainly not," he answered. "I can regulate my own life without your assistance, I am much obliged to you."

"And you persist in throwing up this appointment for no better reason than that you have been affronted?"

"Yes, Miss Osborn, I still persist."

"Then I have done with you, St. John!" exclaimed Jane, her face lighting up with scorn, as

if a flame had shot across it. "I thought you had more pluck, though I knew you were a poor creature at the best!—but to give up like this for a pin-prick, and with a wife like Isola!—no! that is not my notion of a man!"

"Now, Miss Osborn, if you are going to be abusive, I must leave the room," said St. John with his stateliest manner. "I have not fallen to this point of degradation yet!"

"Point of degradation!" echoed Jane. "Do you know what degradation is, Mr. St. John?"

"I know it now," he answered bitterly.

"Yes," retorted Jane; "that's just about it!—that's just about your compass of degradation!—you with your life bound up in tailordom and clean tablecloths, and making positive virtues out of artificial proprieties and drawing-room ceremonials! You see no degradation in want of manly courage or in a finicking womanish pride you ought to be ashamed of, only in shabby clothes and dingy furniture and the disagreeable outside of poverty. You think you are being degraded now, because I, poor and ugly,

have dared to speak to you heart to heart and man to man, believing that there might perhaps be a chord deeper than I have yet seen, which would be struck by the touch of truth. And there isn't! You are just a contemptible man-milliner, as I said of you from the first, and I wash my hands of you altogether!"

Saying which Jane Osborn hurled herself out of the room, having as her mother predicted done more harm than good, St. John Aylott not being of the nature of those who can bear a righteous rebuke roughly and vigorously administered.

Poor Mrs. Osborn had enough to do to set matters straight at all. Isola did not interfere on either side. Had she done so, the coil would have become even more entangled, and there would have been less chance than ever of a smooth unfolding. So the widow had to undertake the charge of mollifying their non-paying lodger single-handed; and she found it about the hardest piece of work that had ever come into her life's "darrack."

St. John declared he would leave the house

that very day; and he said it with the air of a man inflicting punishment and injury. He had been insulted, he said, and he never forgave an insult; he would rather beg his bread than subject himself to a thing of this kind again—he to be lectured like a school-boy by an abusive woman! He would never see Miss Osborn again—never notice her nor recognize her existence; nothing but the most ample apology would satisfy him, and even then he did not think he could remain under the same roof with her; but she must apologize most humbly before he would consent to overlook her insolence. “Did she know whom she had insulted?” said Aylott St. John Aylott with his most prelatic air.

With other things of the like nature, said in a strange gloomy smothered manner, as if he was forcing himself to be temperate—holding himself together as it were, not to forget the self-respect of a gentleman, and always standing on the high ground of superiority, and the advantage to them of their association with him.

To all of which Mrs. Osborn assented, assuring

him at the least twenty times what an honour she considered it to have such a charming young couple in her drawing-rooms ; and how grieved she was that anything had happened to make their residence under her roof less delightful to them than it was to herself. She had thought herself so fortunate to have them as her tenants, she said—with a really great ignoring of anything like unpaid weekly rents between them ; she was so fond of that sweet Isola, and, as St. John knew, so exceedingly charmed with himself—she would not have had such a thing as this happen for worlds—not for worlds !—and she did not wonder at his being annoyed ; she would have been annoyed herself if any one had spoken to her so impertinently, and of course he must be ten times more so !

Thus she soothed and calmed him ; and at last by a copious flood of tears ; by some very natural and by no means weakly-expressed indignation against that outspoken indiscreet Jane of hers ; by boundless protestations of affection and respect and admiration and slavishness of worship

generally ; by the most audacious flatteries and the most patient humility, the foolish little widow, more enlightened in this than her cleverer daughter, succeeded at last in smoothing down the irritated gentleman, and in patching up a hollow peace between the belligerents.

And when Jane was brought to say, holding out her hand, " I am sorry I offended you, Mr. St. John, I did not mean that "—St. John was brought to reply, coldly touching it with the extreme tips of his fingers, " I accept your apology, Miss Osborn, and trust the lesson may not be lost on you." And so the Aylott wheel went on again, cleared of the cog which had threatened to stop it altogether so far as Seymour Street was concerned.

Isola was sorely put to it now to make a decent life out of the broken shards, which were all that were left to her. No money was coming in from St. John, and her own industry was much hindered by his remaining at home through the day. Baby too was in a phase of excessive fretfulness not unusual to his state. He was cutting certain

teeth, that tried his health and temper : and even Isola was obliged to own that he was very cross, the poor little love ! and that one must have patience with children. Then, St. John was more uncomfortable in mood than ever ; more gloomy, but with fiercer and more frequent flashes of irritation breaking through the heavier atmosphere ; more unreasonable, more reticent, and more impatient and exacting : so that Isola scarcely knew what to do for the best.

One thing only she distinctly knew—she must not lose heart nor temper ; for if they were to keep afloat at all it must be by her good steering and unwearied labour. She must keep house without money, tend an ailing child, avoid causes of offence to an irritable husband, and work close for trifling pay—all without flagging and with unfailing courage and cheerfulness. It was a hard sum to resolve, but she set herself to the task : and in part at least succeeded.

Still, there was that terrible fact of want of money meeting her at every turn ; and a fact like this is not to be overcome by even the sweetest

of tempers. Patience, smiles, and hope will not buy bread nor meat for to-day's dinner, nor even get unlimited credit from the tradesmen most susceptible to womanly influence; and when it came to this, and there was actually no money to go on with, then she sat down, as a general in a beleaguered city, and considered what to do next.

She could not see her way out of their difficulties, turn where she would. Had St. John been practicable, and only moderately rational in temper, the thing would have been comparatively easy; but little as she knew of life she was very sure that he had thrown up his situation, not for any special annoyance or real exceptional provocation, but simply because he would not submit to the unavoidable circumstances of his position. What could be done? She would not ask Harvey Wyndham for his advice; she could not go to Brother Gilbert for his; what then could she do? She sat and thought, counting the avenues of escape; and then she resolved on going to Richard Norton. He was St. John's oldest friend; he had been the first cause of all this

subsequent misery ; perhaps he would help her, at least with his advice, and tell her how to find her way out of the dark labyrinth of misfortune in which they were all lost and wandering.

But she found little comfort with the lawyer when she did go. Bland, cold, immovable, while almost flattering in his manner to herself, he was hard as a stone to her husband.

“ St. John had injured him,” he said, with a certain glassy glaze over his eyes not reassuring ; “ and he had behaved with unpardonable cruelty to his sister. And if he forgave the wrong to himself, he could not forgive that to poor Harriet ”—with the thin close lips quivering, and the cold glaze of the eyes broken up and warmed by something more fierce than sorrowful.

“ St. John’s sin has found him out,” said the Voltairean lawyer, who, like another mouth-piece not necessary to particularize, could quote Scripture when it suited him ; “ and what he is suffering now he suffers deservedly. I am sorry for you, Mrs. Aylott, and sorry for the child ; but all I can do for you is to offer to take the boy—as I

did once before ; which at least will lighten your expenses."

"Not yet," said Isola hastily. "If we come to real poverty, I will not be selfish, then—but not yet! He is like my own ; and indeed, Mr. Norton, but for that little fellow I do not think I could have kept up at all! Do not ask me to part with him!"

The tears were stealing quietly down her face. Her life was very real throughout, but perhaps the most real thing of all was her love for this circus-rider's child.

Mr. Norton took her hand gravely.

"My dear creature, do not cry," he said in a tone of remonstrance. "You shall never be called upon to give up the boy, save by your own free will. Come, come, cheer up, Mrs. Aylott! when things are at their worst they mend, you know. Never let it be said that you were beaten in life! I will tell you what I will do—I will advance you the interest on the five hundred pounds secured to poor Harriet's boy. You are entitled to it under all the circumstances, and you shall have it,"

with the air of one conferring a tremendous obligation. "There now!" he said as he handed her the cheque. "That will keep the wolf from the door at least for a time; and meanwhile one never knows what may turn up."

"But am I entitled to this?" asked Isola with a painful blush. Knowing nothing of business, and sensitive beside, it seemed to her like a gift from the lawyer; and she did not want that!

"Put it up and say no more about it," he answered. "If I choose to make you entitled, that is my affair, not yours. Come! put it up, I say, and sign this receipt, and then it will be done with!"

And Isola obeyed—women generally do obey in the matter of cheques and receipts—with a strange feeling of gratitude, almost of affection for the family lawyer, which he was too well versed in women's ways not to understand. Poor cut and dried old bachelor, with that one love of his in her grave! to make women grateful by giving them their rights was almost his warmest human pleasure!

Glancing away from the subject of the cheque, he asked with a certain anxious air, "And how is your husband, Mrs. Aylott?—in health, I mean?"

"He is not very well," she answered. "He looks at times wretchedly ill; and then the life he leads is so unhealthy!—having nothing to do and never stirring out."

"Is his mind satisfactory?" asked Richard Norton.

She looked a little scared, and amazed too. "Yes," she said hesitatingly. "Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Why? don't you know there is madness in the family?" said the lawyer, lifting up his eyebrows and speaking as if he was saying the most commonplace thing in the world. "Aylott's mother, Honor Wilson, was mad before she died, and mad when she died. Did you never know this? Did not I tell you when I saw you at the Hermitage, and explained your husband's position to him? Yes, indeed! there is madness in the family, I can assure you, and I have always thought that St. John had a tendency that way."

“Oh, Mr. Norton!” cried Isola.

She sat down again, faint and overcome. The formless fear of her own heart for the first time was put into tangible shape before her, and she knew now what was the name of the spectre that had haunted her so long.

“Courage!” said Mr. Norton in his artificially cheery voice. “Courage, Mrs. Aylott! Do not let what I have said frighten or discourage you; do your best, and come to me when you want a friend. I will be a friend to *you*,” with emphasis, “if obliged to decline all further dealings with him. Let me get you a glass of water, and pray do not give way.”

So this was the comfort which Isola Aylott carried away with her from Richard Norton’s office—the knowledge that, dark and dreary as was the present, the future might be blacker still, and that she had not yet got to the heart of her misfortunes.

“Poor St. John!” she said to herself, “how kind and forbearing I must be with him! God! give me strength to bear, and to be pitiful and patient!”

Did she know what a confession she made of the insufficiency of her relations with him, when she thus bade herself gather the strength of forbearance, and could not accept all with the unconscious patience of love ?

It was the day of broken reeds and drifting anchors at Seymour Street. Such days do come at times in life, when the most solid hope melts away into disappointment, and what seemed the surest staff of strength, breaks in the grasp. Others beside Isola came under the law of the moment, and times were nearly as bad for Jane as for her. Last quarter's rent was unpaid ; and though the landlord was by no means a bad man of his class, yet, as a limit must be put somewhere to the backsliding of tenants, he not unreasonably concluded to put it to the backsliding of the Osborns now. It wanted but a few days, comparatively, to the Michaelmas quarter, and that Midsummer liability was as yet unfulfilled. So Mr. Rouse sent Mrs. Osborn a letter—which Jane intercepted—and threatened a distress and a man in possession if the last quar-

ter's rent was not paid before a week from this date.

"I mustn't let mamma know of this, poor body, she would go out of her wits with terror; and I must not let Isola know either, she will be so sorry for not having paid us," said Jane to herself when she read the letter. "I must fight it out the best way I can by myself, and pull through somehow!"

It came quite naturally to her to fight it out and pull through by herself, with no one to help her by sympathy or advice. But so long as she could take the pressure off the weaker vessels she was content; and for all her brusquerie and surface unkindness to her mother, she never let her know of any difficulty or disagreeable on hand, but stood between her and anxiety with more self-devotion than many a softer-mannered and more caressing daughter would have done. Mrs. Osborn, since her husband died, had only felt the want of money—she had never been allowed to feel the turn of the screw.

It was a rather dreary occupation for Jane

when she counted up her resources, and marked off on her fingers the possibilities of getting that terrible twenty pounds for last quarter's rent. She did not like to go down to the office, and forestall her probable earnings. They kept her pretty well employed, and paid her scrupulously on Saturday nights together with the other office chaps, as she told Harvey, but she had never asked them for an advance yet, and she shrank from damaging her position by doing so. Poor people in absolute want are often so much more sensitive about loans and advances than are the spendthrift well-to-do, who have no right to be behind-hand; perhaps because of the shame of poverty which is one of the instincts of men, or perhaps because, measuring the value of money by their own need, they think the advance for which they ask is as great a grace to bestow as it is a favour to receive. Whatever the reason, Jane had never yet dipped her hand by anticipation into the cashier's pocket—which was one reason why Smith liked her and employed her.

So, unless it actually came to a man in pos-

session and the beds taken from under them, she would not apply to the office, she thought ; and in the meantime—to whom ? To Harvey Wyndham ? Harvey and she were chums, though he had lately become such a swell ; and he had always befriended her, and had once been generous and helpful beyond all deserving. Yes, she would go to Harvey Wyndham, and state candidly her position ; and he would help her if he could, and if he could not—well ! then he could not.

Upon which Jane huddled on her shawl, and pitched her bonnet on to the top of her rough red head, and with her untidy feet and reprehensible hands and limp gown trailed out to Wyndham's lodgings, full only of the great fact at present uppermost with her—the need of brotherly help—and quite unconcerned about such minor matters as appearance and the proprieties.

How sorry Harvey was that he could not help her !

“ Jane, old fellow,” he said in his clear ringing sympathetic voice which Jane always thought

the kindest and brightest she knew, "I am so sorry for you!—so vexed too that I have parted with my last sixpence to help a friend of mine who came to grief yesterday. If I had only known that you wanted assistance I would have kept back at least enough for you; but I knew nothing, you know; and did just what came before me."

"Well, Wyndham, you cannot help every one who asks you," said Jane, with an accent of admiration that was not lost on him. "If every one comes and picks at you like this, it must needs be first come first served!"

"But you should have been served first of all, old fellow, if I had known," said Harvey.

She looked up, with her anxious face brightened, and smiled gratefully.

"I know that, Wyndham!" she said, "you are not the man to forsake a friend at a pinch. If you could you would, and if you can't, why, there's an end of it. That's what I said to myself coming along—I'll ask Wyndham because he's honest and above-board, and has no non-

sense about him : and if he can he will, and if he can't, he can't !”

“ Yes, that's just it,” said Harvey. “ You know, Jane—at least by this time you ought to know—that if I am anything I am above-board and honest ; and you may be always sure that what I say I mean. If I had had the money you should have had it, as freely as if it had been your own ; but not having it, what can I do ? I'll tell you what I'll do, Jane,” suddenly rising, and standing in an eager attitude as if ready to rush off on his errand the instant he had made an end of speaking, “ I will go down to one of these loan offices and borrow it for you. They are vile places, and charge no end of interest, but that does not matter. I'll find means to pay off the score before long, and I shall have freed you from anxiety.”

“ You shan't do anything of the kind, Wyndham,” said Jane in a deep voice, strongly moved, and laying her hand on his arm. “ Man ! do you think me such a selfish hound as that ? Why should you go to the loan office and not I ? You

are a fine old fellow, Wyndham, and I thank you more than I'd quite like to say, but I'll not turn mean because you are grand!"

Her voice trembled as she said this, and her large grey eyes grew very tender as she raised them to him gratefully. She had had a rough struggle and a hard life, with but scanty love or help in it; and now when such real broad generous assistance was offered to her—or at least the semblance of it—it a little overpowered her, finding out her weak part, and thrilling it with no uncertain touch.

"You know I'd put myself to no end of inconvenience for you, Jane," said Harvey's flattering voice.

And Jane answered, "I know, Wyndham, that you are my best friend, and the best fellow living too, and would help every one if you could."

"Well, but let me do this for you!" said Harvey, who insisted the more earnestly the more steadily she refused.

"I'd see myself hanged first," said Jane. "No,

no, Wyndham ! I'll find some other way out of the mess than that. It ain't quite like me to shift my burden in that way, and saddle a friend with what I don't like to do myself. No ! thank you—I'll manage."

"But you'll tell me if you are floored?" urged Harvey.

"Yes, if I'm regularly floored I will," said Jane. She and Harvey always talked like men together. "You'd help me I know if I asked, and if I am to go to prison—or poor mamma, which would be worse—why then I'd let you borrow for me, because I know you'd rather, than see me fail like that ! But not unless. And so good-bye, Wyndham. You are a trump!" she added fervently, shaking hands with him with her sideways shake cordially.

"Not such a trump as you are, Jane," said Harvey with just a touch of conscience at his heart : he with his balance at his banker's and by no means an inconsiderable one, and poor Jane with a landlord's threatening letter in her pocket ! But, as he argued to himself, it was

better not to begin that kind of thing with her, and then there would never be any disagreement between them—as would assuredly be the case when he came to want his money paid back again, or when she asked for another advance which he would have to refuse.

“Lend your money, lose your friend,” thought Harvey not without a basis of common sense in his thought; and really he valued Jane Osborn’s friendship so much he would rather not lend his money to her—to lose it.

So this was another broken reed among the Seymour Street staves in reserve: and Jane left Harvey’s lodgings in even greater perplexity than when she entered them—every hope cut off rendering the issue out of a difficulty by so much the more problematical.

There was nothing for it then—she must go to Smith. He was her last hope, and if he failed her:—Jane’s heart turned cold and her head became a little dizzy as she pictured all that must follow if that Jupiter of literature failed to grant her prayer. It was a critical moment, not

unlike going up to a judge to ask whether it was to be life or death !

The manager, editor, and part proprietor of the 'Comet' was sitting in his room, grinding at the daily mill, when she entered. It was a very heavy mill to grind, and not first-rate flour when all was done ; but it gave Smith an honest holding on to life, and kept both wife and children above the pressure of want, if not lifting them into the airy latitude of luxury ; and so far it was a brave man's work, insignificant as the result might be to the world in general. It was just one of those uncatalogued bits of dull heroism where a man has not only to do the work that offers itself, but where he has to shoulder his way into the rank of the workers—where he has first to make his work and then to do it. And Jane understood all the difficulties of poor Smith's position—and knew as well as if he had told her by what rugged toil he was enabled to keep his tent-pegs fast, and his roof-tree standing. She would have rather undergone some stout fit of bodily pain than do what she was

doing now ; but it could not be helped, and she must face her unpleasant need as well as might be.

“ Ah, Mr. Jane ! ” cried Smith when she came in. “ What brings you here ? ”

“ I ’ve come to bother you,” said Jane looking at him with an almost nervous directness.

“ Bother me ! you are always bothering me ! ” answered the editor good-humouredly. “ What’s the matter now ? ”

“ I want to know if you can let me have an advance of twenty pounds ? ” said Jane bluntly.

“ Twenty pounds ! ” exclaimed the editor. “ Hadn’t you better say two thousand while you are about it ? ”

“ Well, I would if I thought you could spare it and I could work it off,” said Jane, with a troubled laugh. “ But may be twenty would come handier to you.”

“ You know it’s against my rule—against all precedent,” then said Mr. Smith gravely.

“ I know,” she answered ; “ and you may be sure I would not have asked for such a favour if I hadn’t been hard put to it ! ”

“But twenty pounds is rather a large sum, Miss Osborn.” The editor dropped his tone of familiar banter; the matter was too grave to be discussed with jokes and laughs.

“It’s a very large sum, sir,” answered Jane; but less won’t do. It’s for the midsummer rent.”

“How have you come to be so behind-hand?” he added sternly. “Bad management, Miss Osborn! you ought never to get into arrears for rent. Whatever else you leave unpaid, keep your rent going. It is the most important of all payments—the very pedestal of social position and respectability.”

“Yes, I know all that, sir, and I know that I look like a fool or a spendthrift,” said Jane humbly; “but I am neither. It has been a succession of misfortunes, and not my fault nor my mother’s; and so I could show you if I went into the matter with you. But I’d rather not do that, if you please, because others are mixed up in it as well as ourselves, and I’d rather you would take me on trust.”

“But twenty pounds is such a monstrous figure!” reiterated Smith angrily.

“Less won’t be of any use,” said Jane looking down.

“I don’t think I can manage it all, Miss Osborn, even if I were inclined,” said Smith after a pause. “Will not part do? cannot you do with ten, say?”

“I don’t think I can,” said Jane keeping to the point, but not in the least aggressive. “I have nothing to sell, and no one but you to ask. I’ve been to Wyndham, but he has just beached himself for a friend, so he’s high and dry and cannot help me, and I have no friend with money anywhere. If you can’t let me have it, sir—and I don’t say you ought, you know!—the landlord must distrain, unless he’ll wait; and he says he won’t. I don’t see anything for it else.”

“It is deuced hard on me!” grumbled Smith playing with his keys. “It’s all very well—distrain, distress, and all that—but it’s deuced hard on me all the same! It isn’t as if I was a rich man myself or an extravagant one,” discon-

tentedly, "but I work hard for every penny I make, and spend as little as most men."

Tears came into Jane's eyes. "I know, sir," she answered, still humbled—not servilely humbled—only oppressed and beaten down because she was seeking her own good at another's expense: and that was a hard trial to rough and honest Jane Osborn!

"And after all—it is not my business!" continued the editor. "What the devil is it to me what happens to my staff!" irritably. "I have enough to do to keep my own head above water, God knows; I don't want others to pull me under!"

"Indeed, sir, I feel the injustice to you," said Jane; "and if I were alone I'd face it out by myself and take the unpleasantness on my own shoulders; but I have my mother, poor body, and there is another too—a young cousin of mine, who has fallen upon evil days—and they are neither of them women one would like to see put about by a thing of this kind; else indeed I would not ask you! But if you'll advance it,

Mr. Smith, I'll work it off as soon as ever I can—as soon as you'll let me—and it will be such a boon !”

“Well, if I do it this once you are never to ask me again, do you hear ?” said Smith crossly. “I will just for this once, but hang me if ever I do again.”

“I'll try not to want it again,” said Jane.

“Twenty ? the deuce take it !” grumbled the editor, as he lingered over the cheque. “Why, you'll be months in writing that off !”

“Don't let me be quite so long as that, sir !” said Jane, in a pleading voice ; “else I don't know what will become of us all !”

“Whatever becomes of you I'll not do this again,” said Smith, as he flung the cheque across the table with an injured air.

Had she needed it he would have done it for her again next week ; but he was a man who liked to bully his dependents, and to put on an appearance of extreme harshness, while in reality he was generous, helpful, and sympathetic, with a soft spot in his heart for all human woes whatever.

Jane took the cheque, and looked in his face.

“I am more obliged to you than I can say,” she said, with her face flushed and her lips trembling.

“Nonsense !” said Smith, touched by her genuine emotion. “Don’t be a fool, Mr. Jane ! It’s all in the way of business ; so don’t get up a scene. There ! take this Blue Book back with you, and write me a telling article for to-morrow morning. Gad ! I’ll work you, my young lady, now you’ve got my twenty pounds in your pocket. Come, take yourself off !—I am busy. Mind you make a first-rate thing of that, else you’ll find yourself in the wrong box, Mr. Johnnie !”

Saying which he took her familiarly by the shoulders and pushed her out of the room. “Poor creature !” he said to himself, as she disappeared. “She has a hard life of it evidently, and I’m glad I could be of use to her.”

“I wish Wyndham could have lent it to me instead of Smith,” said Jane to herself, as she stumbled down the dark and dirty staircase. “He is so far more genial and pleasant to deal

with. Smith is a right good fellow too, but it would have seemed more natural to me somehow if Wyndham had helped me."

Which is exactly what people feel—even honest folks like Jane—when they have to judge between the hearty, genial, fascinating manner which regrets its inability to serve—with a balance at the banker's—and the grumpy, unpleasant person who does the kindness asked, but who scolds and grumbles all the while.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLDEN LURE.

IF there were no balls nor parties at which Marcy might display her dresses and her beauty, there were other amusements fascinating enough to a young girl fresh from the country, making her first round of London sights; and if there were no earls nor barons to allure, there was Harvey Wyndham to flirt with, and some of the Montague Wards and their friends, when she had got tired of him, and wanted a change of conquests.

And there was cousin Gilbert, whom she was always hoping to see. But he had been a great deal out of town, on business that was more important than profitable, and as yet they had not

met. Much to Marcy's annoyance ; for what of truth or stability existed in her unsatisfactory affections at all seemed to be given to him. To every one else she was a shallow coquette ; but to cousin Gilbert she was in a manner constant, and, so far as she could be, sincere. Perhaps it was mainly because she could not captivate him like the rest ; perhaps if he once placed himself at her feet she would use him like the rest, and teach him by a lesson he would never forget, the extent of cruelty to which vanity and the insatiate thirst of admiration will lead a woman like Marcy Tremouille.

She often wrote to him, and he always answered her ; but she got no nearer to her object by this ; and her visit to London seemed to her incomplete till that handsome, stubborn, unconventional Californian gold-digger, who walked through the streets as if he was walking through the prairies, and who despised all the things in life which Marcy and St. John Aylott held sacred as religion, should come to rebuke and tantalize. It was strange that she should have been so much

taken by him, with such basic differences of nature as there were between them : but human souls make odd compensations for themselves, and it is not always the worthless whom the worthless most affect. At times they love the noble ; may it not be as a kind of dumb confession of their own want ?

But if cousin Gilbert's absence from town was painful to Marcy, it was delightful enough for Harvey—leaving the field clear of what he well knew was his most formidable rival. And Harvey had lately set before himself the successful winning and wearing of the Newfield heiress, not only as a thing possible, but as a thing to be done. It was a trial of wits between them ; and, being that, he could not doubt of the result, he used to say half aloud to his confidential self. He had done one clever thing ; he had secured Mrs. MacHugh's approbation. Not her approbation of him as a suitor, surely not !—for though she was constantly saying she wanted her dear Miss Tremouille to marry—but to marry well, with formidable emphasis—she would have thrown all

her influence into the scale against any one, no matter who, that might have ventured on the matrimonial path.

No! Harvey had won her heart for just the opposite reason. He spoke so openly to her of Miss Tremouille's brilliant prospects—of her unprotected situation, which needed such wise vigilance on the part of her chaperone—of his own calm brotherly interest in her as a pretty child who needed guiding—and of the fixed and constant purpose of his life, its work, its literary hopes, its philanthropic ambitions, its social philosophies, that Mrs. MacHugh had no doubts to him-ward; at least not with pretty Marcy.

If any one had touched his heart she used to think, with a twinkle in her dewy eyes kept only for herself and her looking-glass, it was not Marcy Tremouille, but the laughter-loving wife of My Major in India. Fervent hand-pressures—once, when alone, an arm round a trim, round, plump little waist—a roundelay of compliments rung out as fresh and joyous as if they were all sincerely meant—suggestive preferences

given to women over girls—careful noting of every special grace and charm—and, while to Marcy, apparently absorbed in her only, to the dewy-eyed little woman of apocryphal matrimonial relations, quite as keenly alive to every movement, every accent of hers—if all this was not enough to cloud Mrs. MacHugh's otherwise clear brain, what would have been enough? It was the next thing to a declaration; and so the merry matron took it, and so Harvey Wyndham meant her to take it. Whereby he won her over to his own side, and transformed what might have been a troublesome enemy into an active partisan. If he could not carry his will with Marcy Tremouille, assuredly it would be for no fault of generalship!

As for the Aylotts, they were clean snuffed out, he used to say; and he knew what he meant when he said so. By clever questioning and the faculty of induction—that is, by Richard Norton allowing himself to be “drawn,” to gratify his rather contemptible spite against poor St. John—Harvey had found out the whole Wilson-Aylott

mystery ; and held every thread of the secret in his own hands. Not that he could utilize it, now that he had it ; Aylott St. John Aylott's day had gone ; and take him in any shape you liked, he would not make a very profitable victim now. What had been had been, but the past is not the present. Still Harvey was glad that he knew this secret. He had a store-shop of such, which he treasured carefully, never knowing when they might be made useful. It was a power, he used to say with that eloquent gesture of his—his hands in his waistband pockets and his feet planted wide apart : and power is kingship, come in what form it may.

One day he was with Marcy—when was he not with her?—and they began to talk of the Aylotts, as they often did. Gilbert Holmes had returned to London now—he had come back three days ago ; but Marcy had not seen him yet, though he had been twice to Seymour Street, where Harvey had met him last night.

He told Marcy this in the most careless manner possible, adding with a light laugh, that

“St. John was as jealous as an old Turk of that wife of his; and not quite without reason,” said Harvey Wyndham pulling out his beard into fine spirals, as he did sometimes when in a certain mood. “For it is clear enough to me, understanding human nature as I do,” he continued, “that if Mrs. Aylott and Holmes were unmarried, that would be a case; and if they go on a little longer as they are now, it will be a case as it is.”

He said this, not to injure Isola whom he liked, but to spoil the chances for Gilbert whom he feared. If he could have hurt Gilbert without touching Isola, he would have done so; but this not being possible he took the sin and the gain together.

“Then I think it is just shameful of Isola to go on so!” cried Marcy with flashing eyes. “I will never go near her again, horrid thing! In fact, I never have since the first day I went there, I was so disgusted with everything! It was all so poor and dirty. And I am sure I shall not now, when she is acting in such a disgraceful manner.”

“She has not compromised herself publicly at all—at least not yet,” said Harvey Wyndham.

“Oh yes! she has, Mr. Wyndham!” repeated Marcy. “She must have done so if you know so much. And how can cousin Gilbert be such a goose, and so wicked too, as to go flirting like this with a married woman? St. John ought to be told of it all.”

“He knows quite enough, I fancy,” said Harvey tranquilly.

“I did my best to open his eyes when they were at Newfield,” said Marcy as if she had done a virtuous action which she was detailing, not too proudly, considering the service. “Almost from the first Isola did all she could to get cousin Gilbert to be in love with her—I saw it plainly enough!—and then that stupid St. John to come over to the Hall as he did, day after day, and leave his wife to be with cousin Gilbert just as much as she liked. I am sure they used to make meetings in the fields and things. I am certain of it! One day when we went down to Hern Pool, where cousin Gilbert was fishing—

St. John and I, I mean—I am positive I saw Isola's hat in the lane going away just before we got there. I had a great mind to say so at the time; and I would, but something put it out of my head, I forget now what. But St. John is so stupid! with all his pride and reserve and all that, he is just a great owl!" disdainfully.

"Oh, he is a poor creature in every way," laughed Harvey; "a man I have the supremest contempt for, and always have had. He is a mere sham—a mere pretence from first to last—character, family, fortune, everything. There is not one single thing about him that is as it seems."

"Good gracious! Mr. Aylott, what do you mean!" cried Marcy fluttered at the near presence of a mystery.

"Will you promise not to tell any one, Miss Tremouille, if I tell you something?" said Harvey mysteriously.

Marcy promised liberally; she was of the kind to promise liberally, whether she meant to keep her word or no. And then Harvey, impressing

on her very seriously that upon his soul he would have told no one in the world but her, but he thought it only right she should know exactly all the ins and outs of her acquaintances—she was very young and very unprotected; besides he had so much esteem and regard for her, he would tell *her* anything—

“Yes, I know all that,” broke in Marcy impatiently; “but what is it, all this time?”

“Who do you think St. John Aylott is?” asked Harvey.

“My goodness, Mr. Wyndham, how should I know?—a returned convict?” was Marcy’s answer.

“No, not quite so bad as that, but the son of that Honor Wilson you have so often heard spoken of, old Aaron Wilson’s daughter.”

“Oh, Mr. Wyndham!” screamed Marcy, “I can’t believe it! What! St. John Aylott, that proud stand-off fellow, that no one was good enough for, the grandson of Aaron Wilson? You are laughing at me!”

But Harvey assured her that he was doing

nothing of the kind ; and then, as clincher to his story, told her all the circumstances belonging to it—the life and death of poor Harriet Grant, the previous life of Honor Wilson, whose child Nancy was—in fact all the circumstances from first to last. And a pretty little bit of dramatic history they made when he had done.

“Now you ought to give me something for that,” said Harvey Wyndham by way of finale. “You have not heard such a story as that in your life before, Miss Tremouille.”

“No, indeed, I have not,” she answered, quite radiant with excitement ; “you are very good for telling me.”

“It is to be a dead secret, remember !” said Harvey.

“Of course !” said Marcy, in a slightly injured tone. “Do you think I would tell such a thing to any one, Mr. Wyndham ?”

“Your hand and seal on it !” laughed the successful city speculator.

“What do you mean, you stupid fellow ?” was Miss Marcy’s coquettish answer.

“This,” said Harvey, kissing her, and with right good will too. And Marcy only laughed, and writhed herself away from his embrace, and said, making a feint at him with her scented handkerchief, “I have a great mind to box your ears, Mr. Wyndham, you impertinent creature !”

“Ah, no ! consider the temptation !” said Harvey, in a pleading voice ; and Marcy answered, “Well, I will forgive you this once, if you promise never to do it again !”

“I’ll try,” said Harvey Wyndham, with a comical expression of despair.

This story effectually banished all thoughts of Gilbert and Isola. Marcy was quite wild with excitement at what she had heard, and burning for some one to whom to tell it. So she unbosomed herself to Mrs. MacHugh, before Harvey had been five minutes gone, and they both talked of St. John Aylott’s history as if it had been a new novel coming out in monthly numbers, and they were feverish with desire to see the next issue.

“Fancy St. John Aylott old Aaron’s grand-

son!" Marcy kept repeating; "our gardener, a mere common man; and that disgraceful daughter of his! St. John Aylott Nancy's half-brother, and the mother not married! And he so proud, and making such a fuss at his sister's running off with a circus-rider. I dare say he was very handsome, and rode like an angel; and I am sure quite good enough for her, considering all things. And then the baby! Little fat, ugly thing; how I always hated it! I don't wonder that poor St. John did not like to have it in the house, when it was born in such a queer way, and that hateful Jane Osborn had anything to do with it. My goodness! what a funny story! I wonder if Isola knows it! I wonder if St. John knows it himself? Oh yes, I should think he did, but perhaps he does not. How I should like to tell him, just to see how he would look! How disgusted he would be! How I should like to get Nancy up to London, and take her to St. John's lodgings, and say, 'Here, St. John, dear; here's your sister Nancy!' What fun it would be! How angry he would be! Oh, Mrs.

MacHugh, wouldn't it be nice to have a charade, or something like that, and act this story before St. John—perhaps make him take a part and act his own story himself? My goodness! how I should like it!"

So she continued throughout the day; Mrs. MacHugh, who did not care more for the Aylotts than she did for Antony and Cleopatra, playing dutiful echo unweariedly, but all the while bored to death, and wishing that Marcy Tremouille would suddenly fall hoarse or speechless that so the subject of St. John's birth and parentage might come to an end. But Marcy bored on till bed-time, and when morning came was as full of the subject as ever.

They were still at breakfast—Marcy "wondering," and Mrs. MacHugh assenting, when Gilbert Holmes was announced, and the comfortably placed companion saw for the first time the man whom she persisted in thinking the rival of her position, and the artful angler seeking to entangle the rich heiress.

"Oh, cousin Gilbert, I am so glad to see you!"

cried Marcy, getting up from the table, and running towards him in her infantine manner. "Where have you been all this time, you naughty fellow! I have been dying to see you, and you never came near me."

"I could not come near you very well, Marcy," laughed Gilbert, "seeing that I was a hundred and fifty miles away from London!"

"You have been three days here, and have only come now!" she pouted. "But, dear me, how ill you look! How ill every one is looking, you and the Aylotts and everybody! I never saw anything like it in my life! What have you all been doing with each other? It is quite funny to see such a set of miserable creatures."

"I am very well, Marcy, for my own share," said Gilbert. "I did not know that the Aylotts were ill either. I saw them yesterday."

"What, again! and the day before?" said Marcy.

"Yes," was Gilbert's tranquil reply; "both days."

She tossed her head. "And you did not think

them looking ill?" she said, returning to the charge as the most convenient thing at hand. "Why, Gilbert, they are both horrid! St. John looks like a ghost!—how thin and pale he is!—and Isola looks as old and worn-out as possible. And how shabby she is! She was dressed like a servant when I called there. I have not been since, I was really so disgusted! I wonder what she has done with all her pretty dresses? Has she sold them, do you think? I dare say she has: she is awfully poor, I believe!"

"I cannot tell you, Marcy! That is a subject rather beyond me, so I cannot help you," said Gilbert.

"No! men are so stupid they know nothing!" said Marcy. Then with a knowing look she added, "I dare say I know much more about the Aylotts than you do, cousin Gilbert, though you are such friends with Isola."

"May be," he replied indifferently.

"Cousin Gilbert! do you know anything of St. John's mother?" she asked confidentially.

Mrs. MacHugh left the room.

“Why do you ask, Marcy?” he answered.

“Because I want to know if you do—because I know all about her if you don’t! Fancy, cousin Gilbert! she was old Aaron Wilson’s daughter, and was never married, horrid girl! and that Nancy Wilson, who comes sometimes to the Hall to wash and clean things, she is St. John’s half-sister. I have thought of nothing else since I heard it. I was so astonished!—it seemed almost to take away my breath!”

“Who told you all this nonsense?” asked Gilbert sternly.

“Never mind, cousin Gilbert, *you* did not, and it is not nonsense,” she answered. “Oh! and his sister!” she continued. “I forgot his sister! She ran off with a common circus-rider; and that little baby that Isola makes such a fuss with is their child—the child of a man dressed in spangles and jumping through hoops! My goodness!” wound up Marcy by way of coping.

“But tell me, Marcy, who told you all this?” urged Gilbert again.

“No, I can’t do that, cousin Gilbert dear, be-

cause I promised not, else I would. I would tell you everything, cousin Gilbert!" very flatteringly. "But is it not a strange story? It is like a thing out of a book. One would never expect such a thing in real life."

"Real life! and suppose it is not real life!" said Gilbert disdainfully.

"But it is!—and it is of no use your going on like that, cousin Gilbert. I *know* it is true," emphatically. "And I know now why old Aaron stared so at St. John one day when we were all at Buckhurst Ground. I noticed it, I remember, and St. John was so cross about it! I dare say he saw a likeness somehow, for I believe he knows nothing about it all, and thinks that his daughter died in London when that girl Nancy was born. I wonder what he would say if he was told. How proud he would be! How I should like to hear him call St. John Aylott grandson!" laughing childishly, as she broadened her accent in mimicry of Aaron's.

"Good God, Marcy, are you mad!" said Gilbert Holmes. "You would surely never do such

a cruel thing as that! You do not know that that the story is true to begin with—you know nothing about it—it is just a piece of gossip that some one has told you out of mischief—perhaps made it up as he went on.”

“No! no! it is true!” interposed Marcy. “The person who told me knew.”

“Who told you?” again asked Gilbert sternly.

“I must not tell you, cousin Gilbert.”

“Yes, if you have told me the story you ought to give me your informant,” he answered. “Who was it? Harvey Wyndham?”

“Then you know that it is true!” was Marcy’s rapid rejoinder.

“Because I ask if Harvey Wyndham told you a piece of gossip?” exclaimed Gilbert. “Perhaps my question showed that I thought it quite the contrary of true. Well! if you will not give me the name of your informant, will you give me your word of honour not to repeat this silly fable anywhere?—not to your companion, Mrs. Mac-Hugh, nor to the Aylotts, nor to old Aaron on your life. Will you promise this, Marcy? I do so hate all this gossip and scandal!”

"Indeed I will not repeat it, cousin Gilbert! indeed I will not!" said Marcy a little frightened.

"Can I trust you?" he asked.

"If you cannot there is no good in my promising, and you need not have made me do so," pouted Marcy, with not unreasonable logic.

"And you have not told any one as it is? not Mrs. MacHugh? no one but me?"

"No," said Marcy boldly.

"Hinted at nothing even?"

"No," she repeated. "Cousin Gilbert! how can you think I would do anything so unkind! Of course not!"

"Then why did you tell me?" he asked, still dissatisfied.

"Oh!" she answered with her pretty smile, raising her sleepy eyes with a soft, enticing look. "*You* are different, cousin Gilbert. It is my duty to tell you everything I hear of that kind, because you are the best judge for me. So of course I told you."

"Well! tell no one else," he repeated. And

she answered very sweetly, "Oh no! I could not think of such a thing; and when you tell me not, too!"

Saying which she crept up to him quite close, and clasped her small hands through his arm affectionately, as she used to clasp them through her father's.

"And now let us talk of yourself, dear cousin Gilbert," she said with her prettiest, most caressing voice? "How are you getting on in that dreadful city?"

"I? not too well. Things have done badly this year, and we have gone with the rest."

"Gone? where? asked Marcy.

"Bankrupt," said Gilbert.

She gave a little scream. "Oh, my goodness, cousin Gilbert, then you are ruined!" she exclaimed, pressing her hands closer on his arm.

"Yes, for the present, in a way. I have lost all my money certainly, but I do not despair of making more," was his cheerful answer.

"Oh, but fancy how dreadful!" cried Marcy fervently. "My poor, darling cousin Gilbert.

How sorry I am, cousin Gilbert darling!" she repeated, bursting into tears and flinging herself into his arms. "Oh, what can I do for you! tell me what to do for you!"

"Why, Marcy, what is this!" cried Gilbert, startled by her passionate demonstration.

He had been very angry with her a minute ago for her share in that miserable bit of Aylott gossip, but he forgot that now, in the fervour of her sympathy. She looked so exquisitely lovely too as she flung back her head and gazed up into his face with her starry eyes wet with tears, and her red lips slightly parted, eloquent of kisses—beseeching indeed to be kissed. And Gilbert was a man like any other, and one to whom the caresses of a pretty girl were perhaps dearer than to many others. So he held her to him with no cold pressure, and thought "what a lovely face it is, and what a sweet red mouth, and what a pleasant, warm, supple, little thing it is on one's arm, and what a tender heart in spite of all the feather brain." And then he thought, and in a different key, "Does she really love me after all?"

Marcy liked to be held thus to his broad beating breast; she liked to feel those strong arms round her holding her to him so closely pressed; she liked to see the grave grand leonine face looking into hers so tenderly—so deeply moved. The thirst of conquest was strong upon her; besides, she was human too, and the situation pleased her; and then—she really did like cousin Gilbert.

“But it is nothing to cry about,” said Gilbert after a pause, smoothing back her hair with his broad hand; and Marcy was not too much in love not to see that his hand was scarred and roughened—and shrank a little at the purple cicatrix of one deep wound got by an Indian’s knife, as he caressed her brow.

“Cousin Gilbert!” she then said, and stopped.

“Well?” he answered after waiting for her to continue.

“Cousin Gilbert!” she repeated; then, after a pause she added, “I have money.”

“Yes, I know you have money, child—and what then?”

“Will you have it? Will you let me give it to you?”

She spoke with a childish self-abandonment, very beautiful, very enticing; acting her part to a miracle.

“Child! do you know what you are saying?—take your money?” cried Gilbert, unloosing her and holding her at arm’s length with both her hands in one of his, looking fixedly into her face. His heart was beating very fast now, but he still had his brain clear.

“Yes,” answered Marcy; “of course I do. I mean that you may have all my money if you like, if you will give me just a little to live on. You are the only relation I have in the world, and I care more for you than I do for any one else.”

Gilbert caught his breath, not at the offer, but at the intention.

“And what kind of man should I be if I could take it!” he asked in a half bantering, half self-disdainful manner. “Not worth helping at all, Marcy!”

“Don’t say that, cousin Gilbert!” cried Marcy. “You are the best and dearest man in the world, and whatever you did would be right.”

“Marcy, I wish I understood you,” Gilbert said slowly. “You bewilder me. I do not know what it all means—I cannot understand myself.”

“What is there you cannot understand darling cousin Gilbert?” she answered, as if taking up a matter of fact.

“What?—whether I am a fool or a puppy—whether you are an angel or a—”

“Whether I am a what, cousin Gilbert?”

He bent his forehead against hers and whispered, half in play and half in earnest, “A little hypocrite.”

“I have always been sincere to you, at all events,” flashed out Marcy. “*You* have no right to think me a hypocrite, whoever else does.”

“Who, if not I?” he asked with a painful smile. “Who have you been deluding, Marcy?”

“Never mind—not you,” she answered.

“Are you sincere now?”

“Of course I am, cousin Gilbert!” quickly.

“Why should I not be? Why should I play a part to you?”

Why indeed? he thought. Nothing was to be gained by deceiving him. He was not rich, not highly placed, not powerful in any way—why then should she assume a tenderness she did not feel? Why should she make such an offer to him as she had just made—meaning all it meant—unless she loved him? The lust of conquest was a thing he could not understand. The instinctive shyness of a loving maiden desiring yet ashamed, and the self-abandonment of one with whom love was stronger than shame—both of these phases of woman’s love he could understand; but coquetry without passion was a vice of civilization not coming into the order of his experience. “Why indeed!” he said dreamily.

“I need not marry him if I don’t like, but I should like to be engaged to him, if only to tell Isola that I am. I will say ‘yes’ now at all events,” thought Marcy waiting and watching.

“Why have you offered me your money?” then said Gilbert in a lower tone, drawing her again quite within his arms.

“Because you are such a dear and I love you so much, cousin Gilbert.”

“Marcy, Marcy, do you really love me?”

Again he pressed her supple waist, and again her yielding form leant warm and soft against his. The temptation was very strong—strong on all sides. Money would be of immense value to him now, and though not mercenary, Gilbert had common sense, and understood the full worth of the material good of life as well as that of the emotional and spiritual; love! oh, he thirsted for love as such a man would—afraid of himself where it might have been had fate been kinder—and offered so freely here; beauty always touched him—where is the strong man worthy of love who is not made weak by beauty? Yes, the temptation was very very great. And if she did love him as he believed, he could make her all he might wish her to be as time went on and his influence increased by use.

“Marcy, my sweet affectionate little girl, could I make you happy?” he whispered. “Do you really love me?”

“Mrs. Aylott, ma’am,” said the servant flinging open the door.

And Marcy’s dream and Gilbert’s danger were at an end.

“Isola ! is that you ! what have you come for !” said Marcy startled and annoyed out of all care for manners, as Isola, fresh, cool, and bright from her morning’s walk, came forward to the fireplace where they stood, heated, embarrassed, confused—the remains of the breakfast still on the table, and her entrance evidently an untoward interruption. Then remembering herself Marcy went up to her guest caressingly, saying in her old flattering voice—

“How nice of you to come Isola, and when cousin Gilbert is here too !”

“Yes, I did not expect that pleasure,” said Isola frankly, looking at Gilbert with a pleasant smile.

“No ? did you not know he was to be here ? then you have not met by appointment ?” cried Marcy, lifting up her eyebrows.

Isola smiled nervously, and blushed more becomingly than wisely.

“Met by appointment!” she repeated. “Certainly not! How should I have known that Mr. Holmes was to be here this morning?”

“Oh, I thought he had told you, or that you had told him,” said Marcy indifferently. “Then if you did not come to see cousin Gilbert, why did you come at all?” she added just a shade insolently.

Isola drew up her head with a corresponding shade of coldness. “To see you, and know what had become of you,” she answered. “St. John has so often wondered why you have never been to us again; and as I did not like to see him so hurt about it, I came to ask you myself. That is why, Marcy.”

“Oh!” she said pettishly, “I have been busy! Tell St. John that I cannot come and see him every day! What a tiresome man he is! London is not like Newfield, and I really have too much to do to run after any one!”

“I did not want you to run after him,” said Isola, smiling good-humouredly. The idea of her wanting Marcy Tremouille to run after her hus-

band struck her in all its oddity. "And I do not want you to come if you are busy ; but I thought I would merely call just to see what you were about."

Marcy did not answer. She could have cried for disappointment and vexation ; and if she had followed the instincts of her heart at the moment she would have boxed Isola's ears. But not being able to do that, she did nothing ; and Isola woke suddenly to a perception of the real state of affairs.

"I see you are busy now, so I will go," she said, with a pain at her heart she could not control. "Good-bye. Good morning, Mr. Holmes."

This last was said more constrainedly than coldly, but any way quite unlike her usual manner of address.

"I will go with you. I am due in the city now," said Gilbert, taking up his hat. "I can walk with you, Mrs. Aylott, as far as you go."

"Upon my word !" said Marcy bitterly, but trying to laugh as if her bitter satire was playful fun. "Pretty doings these, Isola ! I think I

shall go and tell St. John of you. Assignations with a gentleman early in the morning, and then coolly walking away together—very pretty doings indeed! Cousin Gilbert!" a little imperatively, "I want you!—don't go yet! I want to speak to you."

"I must, Marcy—I am due," he answered.

It was strange how the entrance of Isola Aylott had been like the breaking of a spell to him. It was as if a breath of sweet mountain air had flowed into a room heavy with the scent of burning spices, clouded and thick with the smoke of unwholesome incense.

"I will go with you, Mrs. Aylott," he repeated; not without shame at the momentary weakness—the momentary fascination that had so nearly overpowered him. Though the one was only his friend—only his sister—whose lips he must never hope to touch, whose life he must never dream to share, and though the other was beautiful, rich, and might be his own, yet the friendship of the one was dearer to him than the love of the other; and now that the spell was broken, he was glad

to have escaped. The golden lure had been very enticing, but the sister who had destroyed it was more lovely still !

So Gilbert went away with Isola, and Marcy burst into tears of jealousy and anger when they left the room.

“ Now I have lost him ! and now I will be revenged on Isola ! ” she said.

When Harvey Wyndham came that afternoon he found Marcy so dispirited, so pale and downcast and suffering, that he really thought the little creature was going to be ill. And he was so ready with resources, and yet not importunate in offering them—so gallant, so amusing, so pleasant and full of tact, that Marcy quite liked him, she said, and in the reaction of her feelings treated him with more familiarity of a loving kind than she had ever shown to him before.

And in that reaction too she said such bitter things of cousin Gilbert and such shameless things of Isola and St. John, that she placed herself in Harvey's power to make any amount of mischief he might desire to make. True, he

invited and encouraged her by the subtle goad of voice and air and manner, seeming to sympathize with her in all she said, and to believe her wild exaggerations like gospel truths ; but as he was careful not to commit himself by direct assent of words, she had no case against him, should he choose to betray her. He kept, as he always did keep, the future possibilities well in hand ; and Harvey Wyndham had never yet been known to burn his ships behind him, nor to close up loopholes and back-doors.

Marcy was a clever little wretch in her own bad way, but she was as far below the former sub-editor of the 'Comet' in astuteness, as cousin Gilbert was below her in craft : and Harvey this evening worked her up and manipulated her in a manner that would have been comical had it not been so false.

Still she was not to be pitied. What ill soever might come to her she had herself diligently sought out ; and if in playing at bowls she caught the traditional rubbers—and was hardly hit too—it was only her due, and she deserved no sympathy

from any one. Her Nemesis had to come ; and it would be bad enough to bear, though by no means terrible to look at, when it did come. Meanwhile, she hewed the wood for her own sacrifice—and flirted with Harvey Wyndham in a way that even the matronly MacHugh would have thought compromising, had she witnessed it. But she was off guard this afternoon, and Harvey profited by her absence.

“ Courage ! ” said Harvey Wyndham, as he left. “ Courage, Wyndham, my boy ! the game is your own now ; and if you lose it you will have no one to blame but yourself ! ”

And “ Oh dear ! ” said Marcy to herself when he had gone. “ I wonder if I went too far ! What a shame it is of cousin Gilbert to leave me like this ! I have no one to take care of me now, and I feel as if that horrid Harvey Wyndham was like a cat or a snake or a whirlpool, or something abominable, and that he will some day swallow me up and make me marry him whether I like it or not.”

And then being very frightened she began to

whimper pitifully ; and Mrs. MacHugh found her in a worse plight than that in which she had been, when her latest lover, and the most audacious, broke through the thorny hedge of her desolation and made a way for himself into the pleasant pastures of her Three per Cents., as yet only masked and unrevealed.

CHAPTER VII.

AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

THE patience and forbearance which Isola recommended to herself were difficult virtues to compass at this present time, even for a woman so strong in bearing annoyances as herself; in which perhaps consists the best form of womanly power. It was so hard to manage between the requirements of St. John and the needs of the child; so hard to reconcile the narrow exigencies of poverty and the habitudes of wealth; and above all so apparently impossible to make St. John understand that life was not still going smoothly on silver casters, and that poverty has pains not to be overcome for simple misliking.

She did what she could to straighten all the crooked threads which were their present portion at the loom of time, and to weave them into a home-garment of peace and order; but it was rugged work, poor soul! and she sometimes felt that she must give up the attempt, and just drift down the muddy current as quickly as she could.

Her greatest difficulty of all was the child. Use had embittered, not accustomed St. John; while this same use had endeared him to Isola, so that now, she often said, no mother could possibly love her own son more than she loved this little one, nor live more entirely and passionately in that love. Had it not been for him it is doubtful if she could have held on her present dreary way with such brave persistency; but the mother's love was strong enough in her to brace her to any trial which should keep the little one safe from harm, and secure him to herself.

Yet it was not all sunshine even with "baby;" and this troublesome teething-time was not to be passed through without many a weary hour, which however, after the manner of maternal

women, only made Isola love her charge the more. If she could not be patient with his fractiousness, she thought, who should, poor darling? If she did not love him, lonely and orphaned as he was, who would? So she was patient, and she did love him; and she was repaid for all her cares when he held up his arms to her and called "mam! mam!" eager and restless to be taken whenever he saw her; when he kicked and crowed for joy as she sent the "little hare" running over his chubby palm, and up his soft red arms, and round his fat doll-like throat; when he pulled at her thick bright golden hair, and laid his wet wide-opened rose-red lips upon her face, and patted her cheeks with foolish hands that never knew where they were going, and "kissed poor mam" when asked to do so, and said "poor! poor!" with such sublime compassion for mother's frailty and suffering. Half an hour of baby's love indemnified the foster-mother for all the long day's hardships; but this indemnification was in itself an offence to St. John of the essence of a crime.

“If it would but die,” he constantly repeated to himself. Later the burden of his thoughts had been “How could it be made to die?”

A day or two after Isola’s unwelcome visit to Marcy, little Reginald was ill. He had been very fretful all the day, and when night came he was restless and fretful still. In general he slept quietly enough, so that it was only the name of having him in the room at night, sleeping in a cot by Isola’s side, rather than any actual inconvenience that so much revolted St. John. But this was the most painful thing to him of all the painful circumstances of his life; if he could have got rid of the child at night he would not have minded him so much in the day; and if he could have got rid of him altogether he would not have minded so much for anything that was left behind. At least so he thought—all displeasure and dislike needing a culminating point and a focus—real or imaginary.

He had left off trying to induce Isola to part with him. It was of no use; and the contention consequent on his demand and her refusal only

made things worse between them. But had Isola known him thoroughly—better than any but a medically educated woman could have known him—she would have been frightened at this entire cessation, and would have looked for some evil as the issue out of so sudden a change of temper and habit. As it was she rejoiced and felt relieved, and warmed her hands at the fire that threatened to destroy her.

To-night the usually nominal infliction of the child's presence in the room was a real one, justifying a large amount of masculine annoyance. The little fellow was ill and feverish, and could not sleep and would not be pacified; but moaned and cried for long into the night, in that maddening agonizing way of ailing children, which takes so long an apprenticeship to endure quietly. At last after some hours Isola succeeded in hushing him to sleep, laying him softly in the cot by her side. She thought that St. John too was asleep, and that he had been asleep through all this weary time of baby's unrest and wailing; for he had been lying quite still, and once, when she

looked at him, his eyes were shut, and his hand was over his mouth, as it usually was when he slept. So, feeling that her task was done for the present, and that a bad pass was got safely through, she laid herself down to sleep with the rest.

She slept uneasily, as we do when both weary and anxious; with a consciousness of something painful running through her sleep like an ugly dream—a feeling of dread and danger about her amounting almost to nightmare. Once or twice she started up, expecting to see something horrible; but there was nothing; only the baby sleeping quietly in his cot—only her husband lying, as he had been lying when she last looked at him, with his hand over his mouth, and his hair falling over his eyes. And when she had twice roused herself thus, she became to a certain degree calmed and assured; and when she slept again it was with more thorough unconsciousness.

How long her sleep lasted she did not know, but it was still at dead of night when she woke,

though there was a faint twilight in the room by reason of the night-light on the table. She did not rouse up suddenly, but slowly and painfully—struggling with a terrible sense of oppression—something seeming to chain her limbs and her voice, so that she could neither stir nor cry out. Still held mute and motionless she opened her eyes, and they fell upon her husband standing by the side of the cot, his head lowered, and his body bent, as he leaned over the sleeping child.

Dark as it was, it was light enough for her to see his face—would that she had not seen it! for it was a face that would haunt her to her dying day—a face that would come back upon her memory in all times of loneliness and depression, to shake her soul with fear, and agonize her with the memory of its awful revelation.

The tangled hair was falling thick before his brow; the bloodshot eyes, though lowered, seemed like a darkened line of flame behind the lashes, as he bent them with a wild and gloomy gaze on the child; the lips were parted, and drawn back from the clenched teeth; the lines round the

mouth and dilated nostrils were as deep as if dug out with a graver; and through the quiet of the dead midnight came only the hard and laboured breath of the wretched man, standing there with one hand over the baby's mouth and the other pressed heavily on its chest.

Isola did not speak; she did not even utter a cry; but she seized his wrists and flung his hands from off the child, with almost the strength of a man; and their eyes met as she hurriedly took the little one from its cot, and gathered it to her heart. She was just in time. Another moment and St. John would have completed his work: the last feeble breath would have been drawn, and poor Harriet's child would have ceased for ever to be the cause of contention between them. It was almost dead as it was: and as Isola held it in her arms, gasping for breath—its languid head drooping on her shoulder, its nerveless limbs falling flaccid and motionless on her lap, and its pitiful eyes turned to her with that dumb beseeching prayer for help—that half reproachful look of pain which says, “You are my Providence,

why do you let me suffer?" she felt as if her heart would break for both grief and pity, and something too for horror.

Neither did St. John speak. He stood glaring at her in silence, still with that wild demoniacal expression on his face; and then suddenly the wild beast look passed out, and with a deep sigh and an expression of terrible anguish he turned away, and crouched down in a chair by the window, burying his head in his hands, and moaning. Isola let him sit there undisturbed. She could not speak to him nor pretend to comfort him, how great soever his pain. Had she wakened to find him busy about her own throat she would have forgiven him at the first touch of penitence—the first show of a return to better thoughts; but to hurt a child—a little thing so helpless, so entirely at his mercy, and to her so sweet and lovely in its helplessness—no! she could not forgive him that, for all his anguish! She was sorry to see him suffer; but stronger than her sorrow was the feeling that he ought to suffer, the consciousness that retribution is some-

times righteous, and that grief for sin is wholesome and not to be too quickly soothed away.

True, she remembered what Richard Norton had said of his fatal inheritance. If she had not remembered it she would never have looked on him again; but it did not seem to her that he was mad to the point of ignorance of what he did. His intellects were apparently as clear as ever. If mad at all, it was from pride and jealousy and a wayward will too long unchecked, and now burying his better self in the ruin it had brought into his life; but this, though madness in the spiritual sense of an unsound soul, was not madness intellectually, and she could not treat it as if it were.

Her feelings had not had time yet to sift and arrange themselves: at present she was conscious only of abhorrence for the crime, and a kind of terrified feeling of protection towards the child. Pity for the criminal, and forgiveness because of sorrow, must come in a later ordering when the first tumult had calmed down. No! there was no tender word for him yet; and the wretched

creature sat in the hell of his own heart, consuming in fiery torments : but the angel he invoked passed by unheeding, and no drop of water was brought to cool his parched tongue.

The morning broke and broadened into day, but still the dead silence between the two remained unbroken ; and after that first glance when Isola had looked at the demon's face bending over the sleeping child, and flung off the murderous hands about its throat, their eyes had not met. Occupied with the baby and the usual household cares falling into the division of the morning, she went her way and did her work as if he had not been there. She could not meet him naturally, nor speak to him as if nothing had happened, so she preferred to ignore him altogether ; that being, indeed, the kindest thing to be done for the present.

Not that she was specially desirous to show him kindness. A woman who wakes and finds her husband in the act of committing a murder can scarcely be expected to be very demonstrative in tenderness ; it is enough if she keeps up

what are called appearances, and lets no passer-by into her confidence. Besides, the necessities of daily life must be attended to, and the prosaic duties of home go on, whatever the hidden tragedy filling the inner life. As now ; when apparently Isola was only doing her morning's work as usual, and St. John was merely a trifle more taciturn and gloomy. Few people who had seen them would have thought that the shadow of an awful crime lay like a ghost between them, as they moved about the same as ever, and spoke to the servant as they had spoken yesterday, and breakfasted as they had breakfasted yesterday. Crime and horror do not go about with dishevelled hair and screaming voice. They may find themselves ultimately in a madhouse or on the scaffold, but in the meantime they tie their ribbons and brush their coats, and are careful of their teeth and nails, and break their daily bread like innocence and serenity, and no mere outsider can see the difference.

After a time the silence between them became a desperate pain, worse than any amount of angry

words would have been ; and it was now simply the question who should break it first. Isola wanted an excuse for doing so. Her heart, womanlike, had been gradually softening through the weary morning ; and horrible as the crime was—horrible as the remembrance of the face that had met her eyes on waking, and pitiful as were the consequences to which she had been slowly making up her mind—the giving up of her child for very love of it, now that it was no longer safe—yet she remembered, too, all the distress of her husband's late life—his outraged pride of birth ; the kind of fit that had seized him when with Richard Norton, which had evidently shaken him for all the future ; his hatred of the little one ; that fatal inheritance of madness which might at least account for these wild fits of passionate uncontrol ; how Marcy's indifference to him now in his poverty had galled him ; and then, and most of all, she thought of his present misery.

Oh that wretched heart-broken face of his ! it seemed to hurt her very soul as he every now

and then lifted it up from his hands and gazed at her with an imploring look more terrible than wrath. What could she do for him? How could she comfort him, and yet not touch that terrible sin too lightly? Oh! if he would only say that he was sorry for what he had done—if he would only confess that it was an evil thing, and by that very confession give a warranty of repentance! Sitting apparently tranquilly at her work, St. John was breaking his heart at what he thought was her hardness of condemnation, and she was breaking hers at what she thought was his obduracy of conscience.

Suddenly he uttered a low cry—a cry full of illimitable desolation and sorrow.

“Isola! Isola!”

“Yes?” she said in a low voice, looking up.

He turned his haggard face towards her, and held out his clasped hands despairingly.

“Kiss me, Isola!” he cried with pitiful anguish.

“Kiss me! only once!”

She looked at him with a kind of shuddering repulse on her face—a kind of shrinking in her

attitude. Then an infinite pity and compassion suddenly flowed up, softening, warming, loosening all the pale rigid fibres, and with eyes dark and moist with sorrow, she rose and walked towards him, and kissed the baked, parched mouth held up to her. Her action had something of almost maternal tenderness in it, of almost angelic compassion ; but her kiss was not the kiss of love, it was merely the kiss of pity and forgiveness.

“ Isola ! you do not love me !” he cried, seizing her hand and looking at her wildly.

“ Hush !” she said ; “ we will not talk of love to-day, St. John !”

“ To-day and every day !” he answered in the same excited manner. “ Love is a thing for all days, Isola ! I have never ceased to love you, whatever you may have done—never ! as God is my witness ! but you—you do not love me !—you have never loved me ! I see it all now,” he went on to say feverishly ; “ the girl’s mere fancy, the novelty of her life, the very gratitude natural to a woman—yes ! I see it all now ; I was told it last night while I was listening to you

with *him*—it came to me, and showed me all the past as a flash of lightning shows a dark place. You have never loved me ; and I—I have loved you—I do love you, as few women have been loved before !”

“ We will not discuss that now,” said Isola. “ You know, St. John, that I did love you dearly—”

“ Did !” he interrupted her quickly. “ You did love me, Isola ? Then you confess that you do not love me now ?”

“ I did not say that,” she said.

“ But you meant it !” he persisted ; “ you meant it, Isola !”

“ I meant this, that you have not lived a good life of late, and that I do not feel so sure of you in any way as I used in early days,” said Isola steadily ; “ and we women must respect what we love,” she added in a low voice.

“ Respect, Isola ? You do not respect me ?” He looked at her as if he scarcely understood her.

“ I should like it better if you would bear your

troubles a little more bravely," she said very gently; "and I do wish that you could bear and do better than you have done!"

"I will do anything, bear anything, if you will only love me, Isola!" he cried. "Oh! to feel as I have done lately that you do not care for me—that you have ceased to love me—my God! it has nearly broken my heart. Love me, Isola! or you will kill me!"

He threw his arms round her and strained her to him. Then suddenly laying his head on her bosom, he burst into an hysterical flood of tears; which saved the poor wild brain for the time, and cleared off something of the terrible cloud that had fallen on it.

Isola knew that these were tears of healing, painful as they were to see, and she did not try to check them; but held his head pressed to her throbbing breast, gently smoothing his tossed hair, and murmuring soft words in between her tender caresses, till his feverish passion had exhausted itself and he was calmer.

"Isola! can you forgive me for such weak-

ness ! ” he said more naturally than he had spoken yet, with a dash of the old familiar pride in his tone, speaking rather as a gentleman offering an apology for a misadventure than as a man ashamed of an unmanliness, and though apologizing yet retaining always his superiority.

“ You are not well, dear,” said Isola kindly. “ It is no more weakness than fainting or any other evidence of ill health.”

“ No, I am not well,” said the poor fellow putting his hand to his head. “ I have such a dreadful pain here ! I am never without it indeed. I shall go mad some day if I cannot get rid of it. And then I see strange things, and hear strange voices, so that sometimes I scarcely know what is real and what is fancy. I do believe that I am sometimes mad, Isola ! ” solemnly.

“ No ! You must not say that or think it,” said Isola turning deadly pale. “ Try rather to change your manner of life. You do not take enough exercise for one thing—three weeks now

since you have been out of the house!—and oh if you could find some work to do, dear, that you would like and take an interest in! it would be so much happier for you, and for us all!” entreatingly.

“I will try,” he said. “I will try and get something that I can do without loss of dignity. I will ask Harvey Wyndham—I will see about it, Isola; only I cannot take anything. I have not been used to the kind of thing. I cannot do as Holmes and fellows like him can. But I must get something—I know that quite well. I want a home of my own again, and to have you to myself, Isola, as in old times. Would you not like that too?—that quiet refined life of Hyde Park Square! Ah! I was happy then!” with a deep sigh.

“I would like anything that made you happy,” she answered.

“There spoke the true Isola!” said St. John with the old lordly complaisant manner. “That is the proper spirit for a wife! The only possibility of happiness in married life lies in the

woman's submission, as I have often said. Two cannot be masters ; and a woman's strength is in her weakness, and her power of rule in her obedience. Women always get their own way best when they seem to give up most and trust themselves to our generosity."

Isola smiled a little mournfully. Stock arguments like these to a woman who is fighting the battle of life more manfully than her husband, and bearing the heavier end of the burden, seem such mere superstitious phrases !—no better than muttered charms or old-wife spells. But she was glad that her answer had soothed him. She knew the sign—when he was lordly and sententious things were well with him in his own soul ; and as she was one of those who can bear patiently with folly, she only smiled for answer to his words ; and he did not read the mournfulness behind the smile ; but thought instead that he had convinced her—at least for the moment—and that she was conscious of having been too wilful and too hard. And the feeling that he was in the right, and she in the wrong, restored the

balance more thoroughly than anything else would have done, and both soothed and raised him. Poor St. John! it would be a bad day for him when he lost his pride and self-complacency. It stood him instead of a nobler-built backbone, and was the central column of his strength. When that went all would go—honour, morality, reason itself; and nothing would be left but the wreck of a mind overthrown, and the ruin of a nature not able to attain the noble grace of humility.

After a little time he suddenly said he would go and lie down. He was quite calm now; quite himself morally; but he was suffering physically from exhaustion and want of sleep.

“I have not slept for three nights,” he said wearily, “and my brain has been on fire. I have sat up in bed and watched you sleeping so quietly till I have been tempted to kill you just to see if I could make you feel. You looked so heartless, so selfish, sleeping there while I was so feverish and distressed. Yes, I was twice nearly killing you—I hated you so bitterly! But I must not think of all that,” shuddering. “I

have been very ill, but I feel that it is over now, and that I am better again. I will go and lie down; I shall sleep now. Give me a kiss and keep the room quiet; and do not go out, I may wake and want you."

With which characteristic words he left her; and while he slept, Isola on her knees prayed to God and wept as she had never wept in her life before. The blackness of the future she feared seemed very near now, and when it came, how should she bear it?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY OF SORROW.

ISOLA was still in tears, weeping indeed with more anguish if with less bitterness as she sat at the table, writing to Richard Norton, to beg him to fulfil his promise, and take her foster son away to a safer and a better home than hers. Nothing could have shown more eloquently how much she loved that child that this renunciation. So long as it was a question of his good and her own duty she had not hesitated in her course of steadfast holding; now when it came to be the question of his safety, she did not hesitate in her course of unselfish parting. And yet it seemed as if her heart would absolutely break while she

wrote—as if when she lost her child she should have lost her all. It was the bitterest hour of her life at this present time, and one she would have redeemed with thrice the anguish of the past. But though she might weep she must not hesitate ; for love's sake she must accomplish her sacrifice, and leave the issue with God.

She was sitting there, forlorn in her day of sorrow like a second Niobe bereft, when Harvey Wyndham entered. Always unwelcome to Isola, he was at this moment unutterably distasteful ; and it took all her self-control to make her speak to him with the due amount of civility as he came into the room with his free brisk swagger, and air of business pressure blithely borne, and that nameless look of boastful prosperity which is like an overt insult to the unfortunate.

“Where is your husband, Mrs. Aylott?” he asked in a loud voice.

“Hush !” said Isola, pointing to the folding doors, and turning away to conceal her tear-stained face.

“Unwell?” asked the literary handy-man, lifting up his eyebrows and looking at her curiously. “What the deuce has been up between them!” he thought. “No end of a row by all appearances!”

“Yes, very unwell,” said Isola.

“That’s a bore! I came to nail him for this evening. I want him to attend a meeting where I am going, and where I think he can scratch up a few pretty pickings if he is sharp. Will he be unable to attend, do you think?”

“I should say so,” answered Isola drily.

She had learnt by this time the value of Harvey Wyndham’s schemes, which were to make everybody’s fortune by some wonderful miracle of universal transmutation; but which generally ended in slag and smoke, with no golden residuum for any one, when they had burnt themselves out, as they were sure to do; and she was not anxious to promote her husband’s interest in this or in anything else with which he was connected.

“Can I see him?” he then asked.

“No; he is asleep.”

“No, I am not asleep, I am awake now,” said St. John Aylott opening the door. “Your voice wakened me, Wyndham. How are you? What do you want with me?”

“My dear fellow! you do look a little seedy I must confess!” exclaimed Harvey. “What on earth have you been doing to yourself? Pickled salmon, hey?” laughing boisterously.

“No; fever;” answered St. John laconically. “But what do you want with me?”

“To come and make your fortune,” said Harvey Wyndham.

St. John’s eyes sparkled. “Have you any good opening?” he asked excitedly. “You are the best fellow in the world to deal with, Wyndham! you know one’s tastes and requirements. What is it? Stay! wait a moment till I get my hat—now let us go out and you can tell me all about it. We can talk better than in the house.”

He spoke in a wild hurried excited way, so unlike himself indeed, that even Harvey Wyndham shrank a little.

“But you are unbrushed!” he said. “Your

hair looks as if it had not been combed for a month, man ! For heaven's sake make yourself a little decent ; no one would know you for the Aylott of olden times, so neglected as you are now."

He spoke in quite a grave tone of censure. It was but a little matter, but it pleased him, remembering what Aylott St. John Aylott was, and how he looked when first met in Richard Norton's office.

"Oh ! what does it signify !" cried St. John. "All that will come right when I have gone back to Hyde Park Square. I shall never feel myself until then, and it is of very little consequence how I dress or look now. Come ! do not let us lose any time, Wyndham ! I want to hear what you have to say."

And unkempt and disordered as he was, and without a word to Isola—whose existence he seemed to have forgotten in his excitement—he almost dragged Harvey Wyndham from the room ; the hope of making a fortune by attending a meeting to-night, being the newest frenzy possessing his fevered brain.

“His friends will have to look after him!” muttered Harvey as he followed him downstairs. “I must give that poor woman a hint; she looks half dead herself, and I don’t wonder at it, shut up as she is with a madman; for that’s just what he is by all appearances!”

But he went out with the poor fellow all the same, and good-naturedly tried to divert him, and to draw his mind away from himself and his own state until the hour of the meeting should come.

As they turned the corner of the street, Harvey’s roving eyes caught a glimpse of Gilbert Holmes rattling up in a Hansom.

“*He* will console her!” he laughed to himself. “By George, I wish that little Marcy would find them closeted together, he softened by her tears, and she receiving his devotions with effusion. I think that would about settle the business! I struck a good blow the day before yesterday when she was annoyed for some cause of the like kind—if I could manage a second to-day—I don’t think I need fear. Allow me—just a moment,” he said suddenly to St. John, turning into a

stationer's ; where, asking for a sheet of paper he wrote on it these words : " I believe you want to see your cousin, Holmes ? If you go now to Seymour Street, you will find him there. I have taken St. John out for an airing—he is breaking down—and I have reason to believe that G. H. is with Mrs. Aylott in his absence."

He directed the note to Miss Tremouille, gave it to a commissionaire, and continued his walk with St. John, who did not see the address ; and he did not remember, as he thus put into Marcy's hand this cruel weapon against Isola Aylott, that he had once been almost in love with her himself, and that he had speculated on the chances of her loving him in return, and had even gone some distance on the way towards trying to make her do so. He remembered nothing and thought of nothing but his own selfish plans ; and he was none the less selfish because he was good-natured, and had a certain superficial kindness of heart which made him able to do generous things, and pleasant things, like the prince of good fellows as he was.

He was right ; Gilbert Holmes had gone to

Seymour Street, and he had gone hoping and caring to see Isola rather than her husband. He was announced just as she had finished her note to Richard Norton—that note which was to cut her life in two—and now stood with it in her hand, looking at it through her tears.

At no time during their friendship had Isola been so glad to see her Brother as she was to-day. He came to her at a moment of spiritual danger and depression analogous to that other moment of personal peril; and when he came in she had just a wild gleam of hope that he would be able to rescue her from the one as he had before rescued her from the other.

“ You always come when you are wanted,” she said with a smile more sad than tears would have been.

“ Do I ?” he answered, looking at her with infinite tenderness and sympathy. “ I am glad if I am ever of use to you when I do come.”

“ I have no one else to help me,” she answered.

“ Not even your cousin Jane ?”

“ Ah, dear Jane ! yes, she is always good, and

true, and helpful, but I sometimes want a friend even stronger than she ! If I had but a brother !” she added with intense mournfulness.

“ I wish with all my heart you had !” echoed Gilbert fervently. “ I am afraid that the brotherhood of a friend cannot help you much, dear Mrs. Aylott ?”

“ No ! I want some one with the right to interfere,” she said.

“ And I have not that !” he answered sorrowfully.

“ I wish you had,” she said, almost weeping again. She was so thoroughly broken up, she could not hold out against the smallest pain ; and even sympathy is pain when the soul is sore, and cannot bear the lightest touch either in love or hate, in harshness or in pity.

“ You are ill,” said Gilbert Holmes, coming near to her, and sitting down by her. “ Something has distressed you more than usual, Isola. What is it ? will you tell me ?”

“ I have a great sorrow before me,” she said, and here her tears gushed forth again.

“ I fear you have,” was his reply made in a low voice.

She did not hear him. “ Oh, Brother Gilbert !” she continued, laying her hand on his arm, “ my pretty boy must go !”

“ Ah ?” said Gilbert Holmes. He was silent for a moment ; he felt for her very keenly, and besides—he knew what had to come. “ I am sorry for that,” he then said. “ Why must he go ?”

“ I cannot keep him longer. I cannot tell you why, but I must not have him with me !” sobbed Isola. “ You know how I have struggled to keep him, but I must let him go now—for his own sake !”

“ I am sorry,” said Gilbert, “ very very sorry. It will be a hard trial to you, and you have been very hardly tried as it is. How is your husband to-day ?” he then asked suddenly. “ I thought him looking ill the last time I saw him.”

“ He *is* ill, poor fellow ! I do not know what to do for him. In fact, we have come to the worst in every way !” she exclaimed. “ I can see no hope on any side.”

“ So much the greater need of courage,” said Gilbert gravely.

“ I have tried not to be cowardly !” cried Isola ; “ but I feel quite overwhelmed to-day. I cannot tell you all that has happened, but I feel as if I should just sink under anything more.”

Gilbert was silent. He had come to tell her a piece of news to-day that would assuredly not lighten her distress, but rather weight it more heavily still ; and it was very bitter to him to add to her sorrow. And yet it must be done, and quickly too ; he had given himself but little time for that trial, and he faced it now like a man facing a great danger—something to which he must bring all his power and bend all his faculties. He was white and rigid as a marble statue while he sat there, thinking how he should best tell her his news ; but it had to come, and the longer it was delayed the more difficult it would be to do.

“ I have something painful to tell you on my own side ;” he began, taking out his watch and looking at it quite unconsciously.

She started and blenched. "You have something painful to tell too?" she said nervously, clasping her hands together. Then she unclosed them suddenly, and laid them in both his. "What is it?" she asked, as if now that she had gathered strength from the contact she could bear to know the worst.

"Something that I fear will distress you, Isola, if you care for me, as I believe you do," he answered.

"Are you going to be married to Marcy Tremouille?" exclaimed Isola, womanlike.

He smiled. It was a peculiar smile which Isola could not quite read. She would have understood it had she seen the whole of the interview which she had interrupted.

"No," he said. "Would that be so painful to you?"

"Yes," she answered frankly; "I should be very sorry if you married such a girl as Marcy Tremouille. She is not sincere enough for you, and you would be miserable with her."

"Well, it is not that! I am not likely to marry

Marcy nor any other English girl by the present look of things ; for I am going away. I leave England in three days. I go to Liverpool the day after to-morrow, and sail for America the day after."

" Gilbert ! Gilbert !" cried Isola in a voice of despair. " Oh, Brother Gilbert, do not leave me !"

She scarcely knew what she said. She only knew what she felt—the sudden terror of grief at the loss of her only friend—and the words came without reflection, almost without consciousness.

Gilbert made no answer, save by carrying her hands to his lips. His face was convulsed with pain, and his eyes looked as if there were tears behind them ; and then he rose suddenly and walked to the window. He understood now the utter desolation of the woman he loved better than his own life—of the sister to whose service he would have gladly dedicated himself now and for ever ; and the revelation and the consciousness of his own inability to help her was a pain he could not bear without wincing.

He stood there for some time, doing his best to master himself; while she on her side struggled with her weakness in silence; then he came over to her, and again took her hands in his, looking straight into her eyes. How grand and massive he looked as he stood over her, gazing into her face with that expression of quiet power which was so peculiarly his own! He looked like what he was—a granitic man, whose every fibre was braced with honour and truth and that stately purity of strength which is neither the maiden's innocence nor the monk's asceticism; whose nature was warm and whose emotions were strong, yet who could be a friend to a young and beautiful woman, and never let his friendship drift into dishonour; a man of absolute fidelity to his word; as there are a few to be found scattered among the baser sort like eagles among the kites. And women when they meet them have need to go down on their knees and thank God for the gift!

“Dear sister!” he said in his clear grave voice, “the present is very dark for both of us, but there are brighter days to come!”

By this time she had conquered herself.

"I was weak and selfish," she said in a level, almost monotonous accent. "I was surprised into it—I am better now."

"No time, no distance can break our friendship," continued Gilbert. "You remember how the knightly champions used to wander for years over the face of the earth, but always true to the same cause, and always wearing the same favour?"

"You will not forget me, I think," she said very quietly. "I shall never forget you. You have been like a brother to me—I feel for you as for a brother."

"Will you give me a favour to wear for you, Isola? just what you would give to a brother—no more, no less?"

"Yes," she said. "I should like you to take something of mine—but I have nothing to give now," she added in sudden distress.

She had vaguely thought of rings and pins and costly gifts; and her state of denudation came upon her with something of a shock.

He lightly touched one of the mutinous golden ripples.

“Will you give me a lock of your hair for this?” showing a locket. “I bought it to-day as I came along, intending to ask you to fill it. It will be something dearer to me than all my other possessions ; for if I am your only brother you are my only sister. If I marry while I am away, I will put my wife’s hair together with yours—and she will be your sister as I am your brother. Will you give it me, Isola?”

“Yes,” she answered quietly, with no blushing, no girlish confusion, but calmly and seriously as a dying woman might have done. “I never gave a lock of my hair to any one,” she then said ; “not even to my husband. He never asked me for it ; so my Brother shall be the only one to have it.”

She took the scissors and cut off a thick soft tress, which she laid in his hand. Her lips were quivering, and her tears ready to fall again, but she kept them back bravely this time. She would have been ashamed if he had seen her weakness again.

Gilbert held the hair for a moment to let it fall its whole sunny length ; then he pressed it lightly but reverently to his lips.

“This will be my talisman,” he said. “It will be like a saintly relic to keep me from evil if not from danger. I will never disgrace this gift, Isola. It has made me your knight, and as your knight I must be worthy of your name !”

“I know you will,” she said fervently. “I could not have given you a greater proof of my trust in you.”

“You shall not repent it, sister ! Oh ! if I could have helped you”—here the strong man’s voice a little failed him, and he stopped abruptly. “But that is impossible !” he said ; “that cannot be in any way. Now the time has come. Good-bye, God bless you, dear—dearest friend ! we shall meet again—I feel sure of that ! If we are both true to the great trust between us, things will never be wrong for us. Good-bye. Think of me sometimes. I shall so often think of you !”

“Good-bye, Gilbert,” she said, trembling and very pale.

He drew her towards him, but he did not hold her in his arms ; he only drew her close to him by her hands, which he still kept clasped in his.

“My sister!—my sister Isola!” he whispered as he stooped and kissed her forehead.

She gave a great sob and turned away her head, bending from him with her hands still in his, and still quivering with heavy, large, convulsive sobs.

“Isola ! do not !—Isola ! tell me—shall I stay ? Can I do any good for you if I stay ? Can I protect you ?” said Gilbert in a low voice. “Isola ! have pity on me !”

“No ! you must go !” she answered with her face still averted, stifling her voice so as to appear calm.

“You wish it, Isola ?”

“Wish it !” she said pathetically. “Wish it, Gilbert ! I do not wish it, but you must.”

He stood for a moment, torn and beaten with anguish, then saying in a low and broken voice ; “Yes, it is best for you. The world would not believe you ;” he caught her to his heart, and

kissed her pale wet face. Then he strode across the room, hastily and heavily—reached the door and opened it—and Isola stood alone.

Jane Osborn, who was below, heard suddenly a heavy fall overhead; and running upstairs found her cousin lying senseless on the floor. It was the second time in her life that she had fainted; once after Gilbert had saved her on the night of the fire, and now when he left her in the day of her sorrow.

When she recovered, a strange feverish restlessness took possession of Isola. She could not remain in the house—it was as if filled and peopled with swarming shapes of horror and distress. She was quite unlike herself, and showed all the symptoms of a threatened nervous attack. It was little wonder if she was unhinged. Since last night she had had enough to destroy even a stronger woman, and one yet more cheerfully patient.

“I must go out, Jane!” she said. “Let us go together! It will do the child good too—let us go together—if for the last time.”

She began to weep again as she said this, all the same as if she had been a tearful school-girl.

“Well, Isola, you are not in general a faddy woman, so if you want to take such a start as this I suppose you have some reason for it,” argued Jane; “only I must say you look more fit for your bed than your bonnet. And you had no sleep last night, I am sure. The little man was restless—I heard him.”

“Not much,” she said with a shudder. “But the air will do me good now. I have not been out for so long!—so long since I had a quiet happy walk! Do let us go, Jane—you and my baby. I cannot stay in the house any longer!” she added hysterically.

“Now don’t you go and do that kind of thing, Isola, for heaven’s sake! else I shall think the world is coming to an end!” said Jane hastily. “Yes, we just want that to finish us all up!” she added in a half-musing manner. “If you go we may all go, for I cannot pull the whole load myself! Come along then—maybe it will do you good, for something has been up that I don’t

quite see into. Mamma can dress the little fellow while you put on your hat. Here, mamma! mamma! you're wanted!"

"Good gracious, Jane, is the house on fire that you scream like that!" cried Mrs. Osborn fretfully.

She had been sitting in a kind of crooning afternoon doze with the child in her lap, and Jane's rough voice startled her.

"No, mamma, it ain't; and if it was you would not be of much use I'm thinking," was Jane's cool rejoinder. "It's nothing more terrifying than to tell you to put on the little man's coat and hat—Regy, sir! how dare you pull the cat's tail! Don't you know she'll scratch your eyes out if you do!—Isola and I are going for a walk, and will take the boy with us. But Regy mustn't pull pussy's tail!" she added threateningly.

"Well! that is a novelty, Jane! Is Isola going to make you a lady at last? I am sure I have tried hard enough for all these years!" said Mrs. Osborn with gentle satire.

"Yes, mamma, Isola is going to make me into

a lady, and everything is coming right, up to velvet gowns and silver spoons, because we are going out for a walk in the afternoon," said Jane impertinently.

But her mother was too well used to this special manner to mind it much, so went on with the toilette of the "little man" in apathetic peace.

"Where are you going, my dear?" she asked of Isola when they were ready.

"Oh, let us go to Kensington Gardens, Jane!" pleaded Isola.

A kind of thirst was on her to be under the shade of green trees and within the sight of grass and water again; and Jane, who respected her enough to care to indulge her, said; "Very well, Isola, we'll go there if you like; and as you can't walk so far, especially with that big boy of yours, we'll go in an omnibus, and carry the child between us ride and tie. But he must be good and not cry!" said Jane; and Regy looked up in her face and made a square lip and began to whimper, as his commentary on the prohibition.

So they went to the Gardens as they intended;

and Jane, now she was so far on the road, took the opportunity of going to see the landlord, who lived up at Porchester Terrace, to tell him of a little repair sadly needed in the roof, and which they could not afford to do themselves. She would not be gone long, she said, and maybe Isola would not object to a little quiet sitting under the trees with her baby?

Object! Poor Isola! Jane knew that it was the one thing of all to give her comfort and to soothe her. Her letter to Richard Norton had just been posted, and she felt as if every moment now had the value of hours, and that she could not be enough alone with her baby, so soon to be lost! So while Jane trudged on to their landlord's, Isola and the boy sat on one of the benches under the trees; and Marcy Tremouille, who had been out when Harvey Wyndham's note was brought, but who had meanwhile returned, drove off to Seymour Street in haste to ask for Isola, as if her life depended on finding her.

She did not see Isola, but she saw Mrs. Os-

born ; and from her learnt that Gilbert Holmes had been there a short time ago, and that Isola and Jane were now in Kensington Gardens with the boy.

“Thank you !” said Marcy indolently, when the fluttering little widow had finished. “I am going there myself ; perhaps I shall see them.”

And without any further notice or adieu she told the footman “Kensington Gardens—fast,” and left Mrs. Osborn standing on the door-step affronted and humiliated.

As Isola was sitting on the bench, she saw a man come up the path. She recognized him while still quite far away. There was only one man in London who walked as he walked—with that firm free step, the very reverse of the drilled step ; there was only one man in London with those broad heavy shoulders, with that tawny beard and lion-coloured hair—only one whose eyes were so keen and calm, so steady and so searching ; whose smile was so sweet, whose hand-grasp was so assuring ; there was only one man in London who was her Brother—faithful,

unselfish, enduring, and whose presence brought with it such an atmosphere of peace and serenity, such an assurance of protection and support. But this was just the last man of all whom she looked to meet again. She had parted from him with the feeling as if for eternity; and when she saw him coming up the walk it was as if the grave had opened and had given back its dead.

She took the child in her arms and came out into the walk to meet him.

“Isola! my sister!” he exclaimed as he saw her; and his face glowed as if he had met an angel on his way.

“Oh! I am so glad to see you again!” said Isola frankly, not caring to hide the exquisite sense of joy she felt to meet her friend again. “How glad I am that I came here! I had such a strong impulse to come and bring my treasure with me,” turning her face to the baby, and kissing its little hand.

“It will be a lovely picture to carry away with me,” said Gilbert; “you know how I delight to see you with the child in your arms.”

“You are the only one who seems to understand my love for him,” said Isola with emotion.

“Cousin Gilbert understands all kinds of love, don’t you, cousin Gilbert?” said Marcy’s soft voice, as she laid her hand suddenly upon Isola’s shoulder. “You dear things!” she added; “how glad I am to see you together as usual! It is like old times to come upon you hiding away in woods and parks like this!”

Isola started and turned pale, and Gilbert’s face flamed up like a girl’s, as they both shook hands with Marcy, and tried to look indifferent and at ease.

Marcy seemed to notice nothing this evening. She stood talking to them with all her supple graces more than usually displayed—more than usually seductive; with a certain shy, half-conscious bashfulness in by-play to Gilbert, infinitely pretty had he seen it, and with a tenderness to Isola, infinitely charming had she believed in it; but what she felt remained a mystery concealed from all. She was like a soft, sleek, supple leopard crouching low in a bed of flowers; and

passers-by saw only the stirring of the sprays and bells as they waved in the evening air, and not the cruel fangs and claws beneath.

After standing there a little while she suddenly asked Isola to let her drive her home.

"It is all in my way," she said—Seymour Street being of course in a direct line with May Fair from the point where they now stood.

"Thank you, no," said Isola. "I must wait for my cousin Jane. She left me here and will be back again directly."

"That horrid girl!" cried Marcy. "Isola, how can you! Pray don't call her cousin, at least not to me; it is profanation! Call her Cinderella, ogress, fright—anything but your cousin!"

"Do you not know that I am very fond of her?" said Isola gravely.

"Isola, don't! you make me ill!" Marcy answered. "Fond of that creature! Now come home with me, and let that ogress walk by herself. It really is not respectable, Isola, for you to be seen in the streets with her. You should

think a little of poor St. John and his feelings. Come with me like a darling. Do, Isola !” coaxingly.

“No,” said Isola firmly. “You are very good, but I must wait for Jane.”

Marcy shrugged her pretty shoulders impatiently.

“Let me take you then, cousin Gilbert,” she said pleadingly. “Mrs. MacHugh and I have a box at the Haymarket to-night, and we have room for you—will you come?”

“I cannot, Marcy, thank you. I am sorry; but—” he smiled and shook his head.

“Why, cousin Gilbert? why cannot you?”

“Because I have to be with our senior partner this evening. I am going there now indeed.”

“If you do not come I shall never ask you again,” she said in her sleepest manner, without emphasis or passion—just a lazy childish threat, it seemed to be, half asking to be caressed away.

“Well, that will be a sad thing,” he answered playfully.

“I will punish you, cousin Gilbert, if you don’t,

and you too, Isola," said Marcy in the same soft quiet manner.

"But if we cannot, Marcy?" asked Isola imprudently.

Marcy caught at the bracket of individualities.

"Are you so entirely one that you cannot act independently?" she said sharply. "If you cannot come, then may not cousin Gilbert?"

"No, I did not mean that," Isola answered. "I only speak for myself."

"You said 'we,'" said Marcy coldly. "Very well, have it your own way. I will remember you both," she then said after a slight pause, and speaking in a harsher voice than usual. "No, cousin Gilbert," she added, drawing back as Gilbert offered his arm to take her back to her carriage. "No, I don't want you! I will not take you away from Mrs. Aylott—that would be too cruel!—but I shall remember this!" she said again, and laughed shrilly.

Then, still laughing, she ran down the walk, and was through the gate and by her carriage-door before Gilbert could stop her. Then she

got in and waved her hands to them as she passed, smiling. But Mrs. MacHugh, who had learnt her face, knew that things had not gone well with the pretty dark-eyed heiress, and that her own walk at this special moment had need to be very careful and very wary.

Soon after this Jane came striding up with her limp petticoats dragging about her feet, her shawl awry, her bonnet bent, her gloves full of holes, her boots trodden down at heel, her whole dress and appearance simply disgraceful according to social moralities : and after she had said a few rough words to Gilbert—rough only in manner and intonation, not in meaning nor spirit—the agony of the morning was renewed, and the two friends parted beneath the sun-lit trees as they had parted in the darkened room. And as Isola turned away from the glowing west, into the burning brightness of which her Brother walked, while she looked towards the pale grey east, it was as if she had turned into the night—the night which has no to-morrow.

Jane saw how pale and wan she looked, and

guessed something of the reason. She could understand their friendship, which was more than every one could do ; but though she understood it, she was not inclined to “cocker Isola’s unhappiness,” as she phrased it; so began to talk to her on indifferent subjects, as if nothing was the matter; and amongst others she touched on that “hateful Marcy Tremouille,” “wondering at Wyndham for liking her, such an affected impertinent piece of goods she was,” and wanting vehemently to “know what he saw in her but a doll’s face, just such as you could buy for three and sixpence in the bazaars?”

“Perhaps he likes that style of beauty, Jane; and then she has money, remember,” said Isola.

“Money!” sniffed Jane; “that might attract some men, but not Wyndham. He is far too good a fellow to care for money to that extent; and though he is more of a swell than he used to be, yet he is much more vagabond—by that I mean artist—than swell.”

“I think he cares a great deal about money nevertheless,” said Isola.

And when Jane flashed out, "Ah! you were always hard on Wyndham, Isola—that is your one bit of prejudice," the conversation dropped, and each woman held by her own opinion still.

Jane would not have been quite sure of friend Harvey had she seen him during the evening in Marcy's box at the Haymarket. Fortune was favouring him immensely at this moment, he thought; and he resolved that it should not be his fault if he did not make good terms out of his chance. Jane Osborn was a clever woman—very shrewd and very good—but she understood Harvey Wyndham no more than if she had been a dunce set to algebra; and the ambitious, money-loving man who lived and schemed for advancement in the world, and for a "place among swells," as Jane called it, was as unlike the free-going artist of her imagination as would have been a gorilla credited with the beauty of an Apollo.

But it comes into the prescriptive right of women to be deceived, or to deceive themselves about men. And for all her masculine strength

of brain Jane Osborn was but a woman when called on to determine the pattern of Harvey Wyndham's moral nature. Little of imagination and less of romance as she had in her nature, she had just so much as had enabled her to create an ideal Wyndham who stood to her as the representative of all she most prized in man. And she never for one moment doubted that her ideal was the reality. She would have laughed at any one else who had done the same thing, and would have said some rough truths about brazen idols and clay feet and the like ; but for herself she refused to see the clay feet patent to all others—and Harvey Wyndham, her chum, her helper, and fellow press-man, was of pure gold throughout, with no dross and very little alloy anywhere.

Had she seen him to-night sitting behind the curtain making love to Marcy Tremouille, perhaps her faith would have been a little shaken ; especially if she could have looked into the unspoken thoughts of his heart, and have read there the cynical self-confessions which stamped him as the selfish and unprincipled fortune-hunter he

was. But we must all have our Harvey Wyndhams in this life—and it will be a bad day for us when we have learnt to see their clay feet too distinctly !

That night the post carried two letters in the same and a feigned hand. One was to St. John Aylott, warning him against Gilbert Holmes, and telling him of the “intrigue openly carried on between him and Mrs. Aylott — assignations made during his absence, once and twice a day even—and the whole affair so imprudent that every one was talking of it. The writer, who was so sorry for him, and thought him so badly used ! wrote out of the purest feeling of kindness, to put him on his guard and make him take better care of his wife. She had already been the means of breaking off a very good marriage that Gilbert Holmes was going to make ; and she was doing him as much harm as she was doing her husband ; so now Mr. Aylott knew what was going on, and must take his own course.”

The other was to Aaron Wilson of Buckhurst Ground, Newfield, giving him the true history of

his daughter Honor ; and how the St. John Aylott who lately had the Hermitage, but who was now at Seymour Street, was her son, and his grandson. It told him also that St. John was very poor, and not able to give him money, so he need not think that because he was a gentleman he could ; but that if he Aaron thought any good was to be got by coming up to London and claiming him as his own flesh and blood, these were the particulars.

Each letter was signed “A Friend,” and both smelt strongly of patchouli.

“Now we shall see what will happen,” said Marcy, as she closed her writing-case, feeling much as she felt when she cut the leaves of an exciting novel and plunged into a new chapter—“St. John must take some notice of it, though it is anonymous, and if I have punished Isola and cousin Gilbert, I am very glad of it. They deserve it ; for they have both behaved very badly to me,” thought Marcy Tremouille, flushing as she thought. “Cousin Gilbert had no business to kiss me, and very nearly make me an

offer as he did, and then cry off for nothing ! I am sure that Isola spoke against me to him that morning, and that she has been my enemy all along ; and I will pay her out : and if St. John beats her when he reads that note, I shall be very glad ; and if he calls out cousin Gilbert I shall be very glad of that too. Perhaps he will wound him, and then I shall go and nurse him : and then cousin Gilbert will fall in love with me, and I shall have him at my mercy.”

Which was a pleasant picture enough to the young heiress ; how far it would be realized was another matter altogether. At all events she had done something that must bring about some kind of catastrophe ; she had cut the leaves of a new chapter, and had only now to wait until events had unfolded themselves for public reading. It was the most exciting moment of Marcy Tremouille’s life, and she quite panted for to-morrow, and the histories which to-morrow might bring forth.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW CHAPTER.

THE next morning Isola gave her husband a letter directed in a strange cramped hand, and smelling strongly of patchouli. She noticed it because of the odd kind of familiarity which the handwriting had for her—as if she ought to know it, and yet did not—a note in general character like something strange yet accustomed. But this was only a passing thought, as she took it from the dirty-handed servant and gave it to her husband. Her heart was still too full of her double sorrow—her twofold loss—to leave much room for minor thoughts; so the letter was given without comment on either side, and St. John read it in silence.

In a dead silence ; that struck Isola at the time as strange and threatening ; and with a face set into a pale inflexible mask more ominous than any expression of anger would have been ; telling as distinctly as by the voice that this sweet-scented note had brought trouble into the house, and that peace was again broken between them. For there had been a short spell of peace for the last few hours ; and any one who goes through the bad passes of an ill-fitting marriage knows what rest lies in even the shortest spaces of better understanding, and how welcome they are to souls harassed by the daily torment of strife. Now however the old briars and thorns had sprung up and choked the pathway as before ; and Isola had but to look into that pallid face, with the lips compressed, the brows lowered, the eyes lurid and downcast, the hair tossed and tumbled, to know that a bad time had come again, and that she must brace herself to bear it, with what strength, prayer and her own endeavour would give her.

Still in the same strange and threatening

silence, St. John took his hat to leave the house ; and was turning from the room when Isola touched his arm.

“ May I not brush you before you go ? ” she said.

She had lately taken that office on herself. It was only by her insistance now, that the former curled and combed and scented gentleman, whose look of personal care not the presence of an awful death could derange, was even ordinarily respectable in his appearance.

“ No,” he said hoarsely, shaking off her hand with a shudder. “ Do not touch me, Isola ! do not speak to me ! you are unfit to touch an honest man—a gentleman ! ”

“ What have I done ? ” she asked with a little weary plaintiveness, as pathetic as it was eloquent. “ What has annoyed you with me now ? You were not angry with me at breakfast, what has changed you since ?—that letter ? ”

He gave a short unnatural laugh.

“ Guilt has quick eyes ! ” he said.

“ Guilt ! I do not know what you mean, St.

John," she answered; and she looked as if she did not. "It is such a strange word from you to me!"

"As strange as it is true!" he said with the same kind of laugh—more like the bark of an animal than an expression of human mirth. "No! that look of innocence will not impose on me now, Isola. Once I should have said it would have been impossible for you to have deceived me—now—I know you better. God! and to think how I have loved you!—to think what a husband I have been to you; and for such a reward!"

His mood was softening and changing. His own words, however untrue to fact, had always supreme power over him; and he could at any time talk himself into the belief that what he said was true, however wild and fanciful it might be.

"And I have been worthy of your trust and love," said Isola slowly and kindly.

"No! no!" he shook his head; "all this is over now. I know you at last! I have been dreaming, but now I am awake."

"You are dreaming now, dear!" she answered

soothingly. "I do not know what you mean—what you are alluding to—I feel innocent of any wrong to you in word or deed, and I cannot even imagine what my offence is, or why you should speak of my 'guilt.' Such a terrible word from a husband to a wife!"

"If you say that again I will kill you!" said St. John in a low hissing tone, coming close to her. "Wife!—my wife another man's mistress!"

Isola started back, and put up her hands.

"Are you mad?" she exclaimed.

"No—it is you that are bad!—my virtuous, modest-seeming lady-wife," he sneered.

"St. John! have you no manliness—no sense of respect for yourself if not for me!" cried Isola, recoiling still farther.

"And have you no sense of shame? no perception of a woman's modesty?" he retorted following her up. "Are you so lost that you have abandoned ordinary womanly decency as well as virtue?"

"You are raving, St. John!—you do not know what you are saying!" she said with that kind of

contemptuous patience, sometimes seen with innocent people when wrongfully accused and unable to prove their innocence.

“Not know what I am saying? I know too well! Listen, Isola, I know quite well what I am saying,” he continued, speaking slowly and deliberately; “I say that you are no wife of mine, and that you are shameless and degraded—”

“—You shall not say such things! If you do I will leave you for ever!” cried Isola passionately, laying her hand on his mouth. “You may be ill and unhappy, St. John, but you know what you are about!—you must and shall be checked!”

She was thoroughly roused now, and thought no more of keeping peace, and no more of his unsatisfactory condition of mind: she thought only of her own indignation at his words, and how she could best make that indignation felt. As if that ever did good in the headlong current of anger!—as if a woman’s most passionate protest ever kept back a man’s intentional insult!

He threw her hand from off his lips, then raised his own to strike her. Had she shrunk or

cowered before him he would have spared her; had she flung herself at his feet with a pitiful cry, or a terrified prayer for mercy, he would perhaps have raised her to his heart; but she stood so brave and upright—her look was one of such fearless indignation, such self-assertion of innocence—it maddened him to see her so little subdued by his anger—so little conscience-smitten or afraid.

“Take that, and my curse!” he said in a hoarse voice, and struck her a heavy blow on her breast.

It was a cowardly act, and he felt it to be so, even at the moment. Beside himself as he was he had still so much perception left.

Isola staggered when he struck her; but she did not fall nor cry out. She simply put up her hand, instinctively, to protect herself; looking at him with a mingled expression of grief, surprise and horror, while she said in a low voice, “St. John! do you know what you have done?”

“Yes—I have done that!” cried St. John, and struck her again.

He had to exert a certain amount of self-control not to strike her till he had perhaps murdered her. All the savage instincts of a humanity warped from its higher state were roused in him now, and the honour, refinement, and gentleness of a life were laid aside. But in it all he had just so much consciousness left as to know that he was a coward, and had done a scoundrel's act.

Turning from her with an oath, he rushed from the house, leaving her still standing there by the table, feeling for the first time in her life degraded; but feeling also, for the first time in her life, that self-assertion, that instinct of self-protection which follows on undeserved humiliation. She would leave the house; she would take the child with her; she would not give him up now, but would escape to some obscure corner where she could work for herself and for him, free at least from oppression, danger, and insult if unprotected else, and unsupported; she would never see her husband again—he himself had broken the bond between them—he himself had

divorced them. Marriage! was this marriage! did wifedom mean degradation, slavery, submission to insult, the loss of self-respect? Why should she submit to him? why endure his insolence? Had she not her own dignity to maintain?—her own womanhood to care for? Why should she remain with any one, husband or not, who thought of her as St. John thought of her; who treated her as he had treated her to-day? Either she was, as he had said, unfit to be the wife of an honest gentleman, or she was too worthy to be insulted.

All Jane's extreme opinions touching womanly rights, and her contempt of womanly submission, came crowding into her mind, as she stood like some fair warrior-woman, with dilated eyes and quivering nostrils; her golden hair pushed back from her pale face; her hands locked together and raised above her head in the anguish of her passion; her body straightened and stiffened, as if nerved for a physical contest. She might have been Joan of Arc when derided by the courtiers—Boadicea when her daughters were carried

captive by the Romans—Constance when her son was slain—she looked so grand in her indignant grief! There she stood for some time, swept away in the tumult of her outraged pride; and then came back the spirit of perhaps a truer dignity and a nobler womanliness—the spirit of patience and forbearance—the patience of the healthy with the sick—the forbearance of the strong with the weak.

“Yes! I will be patient!” she said aloud, her stiffened frame falling into looser curves as she dropped her clasped hands and flung back her head—looking up. “I will be strong and patient. I will subdue my pride. God help me and give me strength to bear!” she added passionately, throwing herself on her knees.

That prayer answered itself; as does not all faithful endeavour?—and the help so earnestly besought came at the cry of the seeker. When she rose from her knees her passion had passed, and her anger had died away; and though the blow on her breast still stung and throbbed, her heart beat with the fuller, richer pulse of pity,

and she was able to feel that forgiveness is better than wrath, and that the strength which can endure even humiliation is nobler than the pride which can only resent.

“He is very, very ill, poor fellow!” she said quite aloud. “He must be looked after and cared for, else some dreadful mischief will happen.”

And in thinking of his state she forgot her own, like the true woman she was.

Unconscious of time or distance, St. John took the way to Gilbert’s office in the city. His brain was on fire, his blood was burning, his whole being was lapt in the savage fury of a self-restrained man loosened, which destroyed all outward consciousness—which destroyed even his outward likeness to his usual self. Men who had known him in former days, shy, careful, cold, would not have recognized him now, as with tangled hair and bloodshot eyes, lips parched and blackened with fever, shabby, disordered, neglected, he strode by, muttering to himself oaths as foreign to his usual self as was all the rest. The very clerk in the office, who knew

him, looked at him suspiciously, and drew back as he came in. He thought he was either mad or drunk, and dangerous any way. But Gilbert, hearing his voice, came out from the inner room where he sat, and going up to him spoke to him frankly and naturally—as why should he not?

“I want to see you alone, Mr. Holmes—I must see you alone,” said St. John imperiously, thrusting his hand inside his waistcoat, so as to refuse Gilbert’s, offered to him.

Gilbert looked at him with his steady eyes a little searchingly, and said, “Come in here then,” quite tranquilly; foreseeing a storm though not as yet understanding its direction.

His quietness and a certain air of self-reliance, as if he was ready for any emergency and prepared for any chance, were very noticeable as he went through the doorway; as noticeable as the excited feverishness of poor St. John, preceding him, but looking back over his left shoulder continually, as if afraid that Gilbert would take him at a disadvantage unawares.

They contrasted, as they always did, sharply

and strongly ; being in all things the very antipodes of each other. Colour, form, temper, bearing—there was not a line, not a trait that was common to both ; not a look, and scarce a feeling. Even the clerk, though not much given to ethnological reflections, noticed the strange unlikeness between them as they went together ; and wondered, in a mild way, of what country Mr. Aylott was originally, and why he looked so wild and fierce to-day. He wondered, and no more. His business was to keep secrets, not to track them.

What passed at that interview was never known. Gilbert never spoke of it, and the clerk who heard more than he was told was discreet, and knew the value of silence. But Gilbert bore the marks of it to his dying day ; and the broad scar across his breast, where the madman's knife had ploughed into his flesh, was a witness that reminded him for ever of the time when St. John Aylott sprang upon him, lithe and supple as a mountain cat, and tried to take his life in his insane jealousy and revenge. He quelled him at last. His heavier weight and stronger muscle

told in the deadly struggle between them; and when St. John, disarmed, lay panting and exhausted on the floor, Gilbert was standing quietly by the table, breathing faster and with breaths more deeply drawn than usual, but with nothing save the blood flowing from the gash across his breast to show the danger in which he had been.

He had witnessed too many desperate scenes in California, and had carried his life too long in his hand, to be easily moved. It was not his first struggle for life, and probably would not be his last; and for all its strangeness in a quiet London office down in Bucklersbury, he took it as of the ordinary dispensations of the day, and did not let it trouble him too much. But to St. John it was as strange as it was horrible, and made him feel as if he had bodily passed through hell while it had lasted. Miserable man! he was at this moment in hell, if state is being!

After a short time of exhaustion he fell into a violent fit of hysterics, coupled with a contrition so abject, that Gilbert's blood ran cold to hear a man so self-debased. He had met violence with

strength, but this was worse than the most frenzied amount of fury.

“Get up, Aylott!” he said sternly. “God! you turn my heart to see you! Get up I say! Do you want me to kick you up?”

But it was some moments before St. John could rise from the floor where he was writhing, weeping, praying like a creature absolutely possessed—or, if not possessed, then absolutely loathsome in his unmanliness; but, after a time, when he did fairly rise, that mood of hysterical contrition passed, and one of a gloomy, sullen, clouded state of smothered fury took its place instead.

“It shall come yet!” he said with a lowered head and a sidelong glance. “If I live over to-day I will have my revenge!”

“If you live over to-day perhaps you will come to your better senses,” Gilbert answered. “The only excuse is that you are mad.”

“I am not so mad as not to know what I am about and what I mean to do,” said St. John with a sudden flaming up. “I am not so mad as to let you escape me, fellow!”

“Come! come! no more of this, Aylott!” said Gilbert authoritatively. “I am not going through the same farce of assassination again! Come! gather your senses together, man, and see what a pitiful figure you cut! Where is your pride? and where has your fear of ridicule gone? Melodrama in Bucklersbury, and bowie knives among domestics and shirtings! Little as I know of London life, I can see the incongruity and folly of such a combination! Besides, my time is valuable, and I cannot lose any more over such absurdity.”

“You shall hear me for as long as I like to stay!” said St. John haughtily. “What are such men as you made for but to be under us?”

Gilbert smiled a little contemptuously. “I am afraid you must try your system of superiority on some one else, Aylott,” he said. “I have been used too long to a life where a man’s value was in himself and not in his means, to be much impressed by this kind of thing. You are losing your time with me!”

“Do you know to whom you are speaking,

fellow?" said St. John with extreme disdain, drawing himself up and facing Gilbert with a dark look.

"Aylott! can you listen to reason!" said Gilbert earnestly.

"To such reason as this!" said St. John, suddenly hitting out.

"This is mere child's play!" said Gilbert coolly seizing his hands and holding them. "I am not going to hurt you, St. John, but I cannot let this kind of thing go on. You must leave me—else worse will come of it."

"I will leave you only at my own pleasure," retorted the poor fellow, in his proud mad way.

"No, at mine," said Gilbert; "and now—"

He opened the office door, and saying, "Good day, Mr. Aylott," in a loud voice, St. John found himself, he scarcely knew how, in the clerk's office, and so was handed to the street; while Gilbert, by this time a little faint from loss of blood, had his wound attended to and the gaping edges strapped together.

After this poor St. John knew nothing. Wan-

dering through the streets he saw men and women passing and repassing as one sees things in a dream—without any distinct knowledge of what he saw—without any clear vision or understanding. Many stopped and looked after him ; a few turned and followed him ; the police eyed him sharply ; children and young girls shrank from him as he wandered on ; Marcy passed him in her carriage, and hid herself to avoid his eyes ; Harvey met him face to face and muttered “ Poor beggar ! ” as he turned aside not to be recognised ; but St. John saw nothing of all this. His mind was a chaos of suffering wherein nothing was made out—not even the lines of pain that scored his soul through and through.

It was the simple consciousness of anguish—of an infinite agony that likened him in his own mind to martyrs who have died on the cross or perished in the flame—to the sinless Cains who have been tortured for crimes not their own. Had he deserved it, he thought, he might have borne it better—but from her—the blow that had destroyed his name and honour and shattered

his pride and self-esteem for ever, to have come from her ! How all his miseries had come from her !—all had dated from the time when her relatives, not his, had first entered their house, like the serpent gliding into paradise, and poisoned both happiness and honour. Newfield, Richard Norton's shameful story, Harvey Wyndham and his fatal counsels, Gilbert Holmes and his infamy, all had come upon him through the Osborns—through Isola. And why ? Had he not always loved her ? Yes, as few wives are loved !—he groaned aloud, while the tears ran down his poor wan face like rain—and what had she brought him in return ? Disgrace, misery, poverty, degradation, and now—something perhaps worse than all that had gone before !

He had walked in this wild hunted way for the whole day through ; and evening had now come. It was getting dark ; but he was still sitting in Kensington Gardens, where he had been for the last hour or more—deaf to the fact that closing time had come and that the keepers were calling their evensong of “all out,” as they slowly beat

the walks and alleys and drove the public to the open gates. Some one spoke to him in passing, as he sat there with his face bent upon his open hands and his hair falling like a black cascade from his brow ; but he heard nothing ; not until the keeper came and laid his hand upon him roughly, and shook him as he would have shaken a beggar.

Then Aylott St. John Aylott, the proud man's prouder son, started into consciousness again, and woke to the life of the moving world about him. With a sharp and haughty word to the man, who gave him back a surlier answer, he turned down the pathway and took the direction of home. Home ? had he a home anywhere ?

As he went up the stairs he heard voices in the room. He did not stop to listen, and so perhaps recognize them. A man's voice, striking in with its deeper though a feeble key, set all his wild blood boiling again. Who was it that dared to visit Isola at this late hour, and in his absence ? Was life even a more frightful thing, and she more abandoned, than he had yet imagined ?

He dashed open the door and strode in suddenly ; standing in the doorway like some ghost called from the grave, pale, haggard, menacing, distraught.

In front of him, as they sat like equals in the presence of an equal, were Aaron and Nancy Wilson ; and near them, with the child undressed on her knees, sat Isola, very pale yet, and saddened and subdued, but speaking with them calmly, and with no distinction of class apparent in her voice or manner.

“ Ah, there he is !” said Aaron when St. John entered ; “ and Lord above, how like my poor daughter when she was badly !” He rose and went up to the young man. “ I have heard all about my poor girl your mother to-day,” he said with touching tenderness, offering his hand ; “ and as how you are my grandson as sure as Honor was my daughter. And I have heard tell too, that great gentleman as you are, you are only poorly-favoured just now, so I have come to give you what help I can, sir.”

St. John made no reply. He fixed his eyes on

the upturned face of the old man as he stood before him with his white hair flowing down to his shoulders, and that strange mixture of natural tenderness and conventional respect belonging to the grandfather and the peasant in his manner: but he did not answer. It seemed as if he did not quite understand what was said.

Isola looked at him anxiously; his dead silence and the wild glare of his dark eyes seemed to affect old Aaron painfully; while Nancy shrank nearer to Isola and the child, partly in fear and partly to protect.

“My granddaughter and me, we has a little matter saved,” continued Aaron; “it is but a little matter, sir, to such as you, but maybe will be better than nought. Anyways I have come to London to-day to share it with you for my poor girl’s sake; for I loved her, sir, and she was a good daughter to me till she took up with bad ways and left home for evil courses, as likely you know, sir?”

“What is all this?—what do you mean?” asked St. John with a wild stare. “I do not

know what you are talking of," putting his hand to his head. "I am bewildered!"

"I had this, sir," said the old man fumbling in his pocket, and producing a note—the counterpart of the one St. John had had in the morning; "and I came on it as I was, with my work-a-day coat and breeches as you see. For I wanted to see my grandson afore I died—poor Honor's boy. And I wanted to help you, if, as this here note says, you was slack just now. See, sir, the letter is signed 'A Friend,' and a friend it was as gave me the chance of seeing my poor girl's son. Not but that I marked you from the first; but I knew nothing then, and knowing is more than believing."

"What about this note?" asked St. John in the same bewildered manner as before.

"Nancy there took it to Mrs. Joyce," answered Aaron garrulously; "and Mrs. Joyce she say as how it looked correct, and as how she could a'most swear it was Miss Marcy's writing. You mind Miss Marcy of the Hall, sir? It was like her writing, Mrs. Joyce say, and so said Miss

Rosa; and they both said as how they felt for sure you was my grandson and—”

“They said I was your grandson?” repeated St. John with a wilder stare.

“Yes, sir,” answered Aaron.

“It is a lie! it is a damned lie!” shouted St. John loudly. “I am not your grandson; my mother was not Honor Wilson!”

“You need not have a fear of me, sir,” said Aaron; “I know my place. I am a gardener and you are a gentleman; but,” he murmured, “you have my girl’s eyes, sir, and the way she had with her head, Lord love her! And for her sake I’d eat workhouse bread, to set her son up a bit.”

He pushed into St. John’s hands a greasy leather purse, in which was his store of little savings—twenty pounds and a few odd shillings.

St. John held it up in the air and jingled it.

“What a joke it all is!” he cried. “His grandson—my mother’s bastard—my wife false—and money from a pauper; what a rare joke! what a jolly joke!”

He burst into a loud ringing laugh, tossing the purse up in the air.

“Merciful God!” cried Isola rushing to him and flinging her arms about him. “It has come!”

It had come. Pride, sorrow, jealousy, and the wreck that lies in failure, had done their work at last. The ruined gentleman, grandson of a peasant, the proud inheritor of a disgraced name, the pure son of a profligate mother, the doubting husband of a faithful wife, the man whom she held in her arms and clasped to her heart as his last place of refuge, was mad; and his human life was over now for ever.

And this was the new chapter which Marcy Tremouille had opened.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE DEPTHS.

THE most desolate creature in the world is a married woman whose husband has ceased to be her support. Women cannot help her and men must not. As lonely as a widow, and without a widow's liberty—as unprotected as an orphan, and without an orphan's future—she is like one turned adrift with bound hands into danger, unable to help herself and not suffered to be defended. Any one may help an unmarried woman, but a wife must bear her own cross without a friend to share it, if her husband fails.

This was Isola's position now as she sat by the grave of her life. In the first flush of her new trouble she had turned instinctively to the

thought of Gilbert Holmes. Indeed to whom else could she turn? Richard Norton had been called suddenly to Ireland, which was the reason why the note respecting the custody of the boy still remained unanswered; Harvey Wyndham she both doubted and disliked; Jane, though energetic and good, had not the power of a man, if all the will to perform the work of one; and this was one of those times when even strong women need the help of men. So that she had but Gilbert as her background; and it seemed natural to her that she should appeal to him in her trouble; and for all that he was on the eve of leaving, there might yet be time for him to help her, she thought yearningly.

But as she sat down to write to him, her eyes fell on the note of the morning, lying on the carpet; and with a strange thrill of vague fear she took it up and read it through. When she had finished it she laid it quietly down again; but it was as if she had laid down her crown. Whatever might befall her in the future would not equal the anguish of this moment, when she first

knew herself evil-spoken of with Brother Gilbert—when she first knew that what had been such a noble friendship between them had been degraded by others to the level of a low intrigue. She was almost glad now, that he was going out of England, for how could she have met him again? How, knowing what was said, could she have continued her pleasant friendship, so giving colour to the slander?

She had now touched the depths. Her husband mad; her fair name tarnished; poor; alone; the only friend who might have helped her rendered doubly impossible—what could she do? For a moment—for many moments—she felt as if she must give up the struggle. She was no coward, but the fight was too hard, and fate was too strong. She thought with passionate longing of the rest from sorrow lying in the quiet of the grave. Such a mere step as it was between those two immensities, time and eternity!—such a small half-moment of resolution that was needed—and the peace of a sleep which has no awaking into grief again, would be hers! So easy to be done!

—why should she not free herself from her bondage? Others had done so, why should not she? What had she to live for now! how indeed could she live through the trial!

As she thought all this, sitting mute and motionless by the table, her eyes fixed and her pale lips tightly pressed, lost to all but the consciousness of despair, a tiny hand crept along her arm—a warm soft loving form strove to clamber into her lap—and a clear voice said beseechingly “Mamma! take baby! baby tired, mamma! take baby, mamma!”

That little voice roused her from her dumb despair; and as she raised the child and clasped him to her breast, she understood more clearly than she had ever understood before, the blessed value of motherhood and the full meaning of its duties. Were it not for the brighter future, who could bear the darkened present? Were it not for love of others who would value his own existence? Protectors might fail her, but she must not fail the one she had undertaken to protect: if she was widowed that little one must not be orphaned.

“I will work for you and live for you, my pretty boy!” she said holding the child lovingly in her arms. “I will not be weak or cowardly—I will face my sorrow, and God will send me help. I will give myself to you, and conquer all for you, my darling, my life’s treasure! I am yours, not my own, and I will give myself to you and keep back nothing for myself!”

When Isola took this vow of endurance and self-abnegation for the sake of love, she took on herself a very different form of sacrifice from that which her husband had demanded. The one had been the annihilation of free will—the other was the free gift of love. And she felt as we all must, that just as moral slavery is degrading, so is self-consecration ennobling; and that no one ever yet performed an act of voluntary sacrifice, who did not receive back a richer measure of spiritual grace.

She had need of all spiritual grace at this time, poor soul! and of all her faith and courage—for the day was very dark and her burden very heavy!

The medical man who was called in, made the

immediate future of poor St. John plain enough ; and when he was taken to the asylum all was done for him that could be done at the present moment ; and nothing remained for Isola but patience, work, and quiet waiting for the sunlight to break through the present clouds.

Meanwhile the truth leaked out, as truth generally does leak out sooner or later ; and it became known to all concerned who had sent those two anonymous letters, smelling strongly of patchouli, and signed A Friend. Jane herself wrote to Marcy, telling her in no very gentle terms, all that she had done by her “vile slanders against one she was simply too small, and bad, and mean, and poor to understand ;” and threatening her with all sorts of vague terrors, which she made specially vague and specially terrifying.

Gilbert too wrote to her, a farewell letter—short, sharp, and stern—a letter which she never forgot, and which touched her more than all the rest. He had seen the note which had reference to himself—St. John had it in his hand at the moment of his mad attack—and recognizing the

handwriting as others had done, had thus understood the whole fatal plot. It steadied his feelings for Marcy, which more than once had wandered towards her: was it strange that they had done so?—and made him very thankful that he had escaped the lure which at one time had been so tempting. It had been only by a chance that he had escaped; and Isola had been the guardian angel by whom that chance had been wrought.

Marcy knew what a terrible mistake she had made when she received this farewell letter, and saw herself discovered and discarded. It was too late now to retreat or to make amends. She had fired the mine, and she must stand by and watch its burning without the power to stop the flames; she had set the stone rolling, and it was of no use to tell her victims now to clear the track. She cried and fretted a good deal when she read cousin Gilbert's cold and stern letter of eternal farewell; and she was almost sick with terror when Jane told her of St. John's madness, and how that she and Isola and Mrs. Osborn had all read that letter from A Friend, and all knew

who the friend was. But by degrees she calmed down—crying not enhancing her charms—and took comfort from the thought that Isola would never dare to put her in prison for libel as Jane had said—besides, no one could swear that she had written the letter; no one saw her do it, and she had disguised her hand, she was sure, most cleverly.

She made apparently quite aimless inquiries of Harvey Wyndham respecting this same formidable law of libel, and the penalties attached to anonymous letters: and he, knowing what he was about, cheered her up wonderfully by his reassuring declarations. But at the same time he made her understand that he was her great mainstay in the matter, and that without him she would come to grief as he phrased it, and be pinched a little severely. So long as he was about her, she was safe; he would take care no harm came to her, she might be sure of that; but only so long. And Marcy, who had the usual credulity of cowardice, believed him, and kept him about her—continually about her—much to

his own satisfaction, to the satisfaction of his ambitious hopes, and to Mrs. MacHugh's suddenly awakened chagrin. For when Harvey had made his footing with the heiress sure, he cast off the companion; and the dewy-eyed little woman had to acknowledge her master in craft and cleverness.

Marcy had to acknowledge the same; for before many days were over, she found herself engaged to become Mrs. Harvey Wyndham by the end of next month, without the slightest chance of escape how much soever she might desire it. He held her by fear, by complaisance, by the knowledge of her sin, by the ascendancy of strength over weakness; and struggle in her bondage as she might, she was securely hooked now, and would soon be safely landed.

So this was the end of Marcy's dreams concerning earls and barons; and this was the outcome of that pleasant Newfield summer. It was a righteous retribution, for both; and so they both found in the future, when deeper knowledge had led to deeper contempt on both

sides ; and the scheming which had never been love, had become the hatred which did not care to mask itself even in indifference. They too sowed the wind, as others had done ; and they reaped the whirlwind which is the inevitable harvest.

It was the bitterest day of Jane Osborn's life when the letter came, which announced the approaching marriage of her "chum" with Marcy Tremouille. She could have forgiven any other but this, she thought ; even that weak-eyed, foolish-looking mass of lymph, Rosa Varley ; but that Wyndham, who stood to her as the representative of common sense, good business faculty, Bohemian truth, generosity, fraternity, and vagabondism, should sell himself to a pretty face and a bad heart for two thousand a year, were "harder lines" than she could bear. She did not often cry, but she did cry to-day, after she had read his letter—as she had cried once before after she had read a letter from him—but those were rather different tears from these which gushed out now in a geyser of disappointment, anger, and jealous rage such as she had never felt before, and would never know again.

When her mother came into her den to tell her that dinner was ready, she could not conceal the fact that she had been weeping like a school-girl, and was weeping even now.

“Why, Jane, you are crying!” said Mrs. Osborn in a tone of extreme astonishment. “Why, what ever is the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter, and I am not crying, mamma!” was Jane’s disdainful answer, as she snuffed violently, and blew her nose with tremendous force. “I wish you would not be so silly, and that you would leave me alone!”

“It is all very well to say that nothing is the matter, and that you wish I would leave you alone, Jane,” returned Mrs. Osborn tenaciously; “but you have been crying, and you are crying now; and if it is not just a headache—and I am sure I don’t wonder at your head aching all day long with the horrid smells here—why good gracious, Jane! I found some old rhubarb powder yesterday in one of the boxes, so no wonder it smells like this!—you ought to tell your dear mamma what is the matter. I wish that you were more com-

fortable and more like other daughters," she added with a sigh. "If you had been a pleasant little coozleums now, like Miss Tremouille, for instance—though she did affront me very much when she called here last, and she has not behaved well about those letters and things—still, she is a coozleums, Jane; and you might be more like her in that!"

"Miss Tremouille!" snapped Jane. "Hadn't you better want me to be a Dutch doll at once, mamma!"

"Well, my dear, Dutch dolls are not impertinent to their mammas, at all events," said Mrs. Osborn; "and Dutch dolls sometimes get fine cradles; and finer ones than young ladies like yourself get, let me tell you! And I should not wonder if little Miss Coozleums got something very great one of these days; what do you say she is worth, Jane?—a man of title?"

"She has got better than a man of title," said Jane in her rough voice and with difficulty. "She is going to be married to Wyndham."

"To Mr. Wyndham?"

“ Didn’t I say so ? ” snapped Jane.

“ Well then, Jane, he is a horrid dishonourable fellow ! ” cried Mrs. Osborn. “ I always said he ought to have married you ; and so I say still. What business had he to run after you as he did, if he meant nothing ! He dare not have done so had poor dear Mr. Osborn been alive ! He would soon have taught him his duty or put him out, I can tell you ! ”

“ Mamma, you are incorrigible ! ” said Jane angrily. “ You are no better than a child with all your silly talk ! ”

“ I am not quite such a child as not to see some things, Miss Jane ! ” retorted her mother, almost as angrily.

“ Well, you never saw that, and you shall not say it, ” said Jane.

“ I will say just what I like, Jane, without asking your leave ! And I say again that Mr. Wyndham ought to have married you ; and I thought he was going to, which is more. He has no business to go and marry Miss Tremouille—now then !—it is a very dishonourable thing to do ;

and upon my word ! that is the reason why you have been crying," she added with sudden enlightenment.

"Crying because of Wyndham's marriage !" cried Jane. "What possible difference can it make to me ! His marriage is nothing to me !" very violently.

"Yes, it is, Jane ; and you are in love with him, and have been crying after him," persisted her mother. "Poor Jeannette !" she added as her daughter dashed indignantly from the room ; "and so she fell in love after all, just like any one else ! How I wish I had seen it at the time ! That wretched little girl, and that vile deceitful man—oh that vile man ! how I wish I had him here ! Poor Jeannette ! and I to call that little reptile coozleums !"

Certainly it was nothing to Jane whom Wyndham chose to marry ; it could be no disappointment to her, either for herself or for any other aspirant known to her, and yet it somehow took all the colour out of her life, and destroyed the one sole filmy web of romance she had ever

woven. She grew gaunt and old in a month ; her large eyes looked larger than ever as the muscles of the sockets shrank and the skin grew dark and brown ; her manners became more angular ; her bony frame grew leaner ; her indifference to dress and to all the feminine niceties of appearance increased to an almost savage state of carelessness ; and she aged and hardened till all womanhood seemed rasped out of her, as she went daily to office-work like a man, and blew up compositors and readers like a man too. Save that she did not swear. She grew to be a standing institution at the office of the ‘ Comet,’ and “ old Johnny Osborn ” in her frayed black gown trailing about her feet, and her general air of dilapidation and pitchforked apparel, excited no more sensation among the boys and men of that establishment than if she had been an office boy herself.

Jane did not mind what was said of her. So long as she could make a sufficient income for herself and her mother, do her work well and manfully, indoctrinate Isola with her opinions, and make women generally understand that they

were slaves and idiots, she was content. She knew quite well that life had more thorns than roses for her ; but then she knew also that she was more thick-skinned than her sisters, and cared less for either flowers or thorns. She kept fast hold of certain virtues—she was ever truthful, honest, unselfish, helpful—and if “ she could not play pretty ” with other women, as she called it, neither could other women work and toil with her. So that on the whole she was content with her own share in the world ; and would rather have been the ungainly and unlovely boy-woman she was than even Isola, whom, of all women unfortunate enough to be women, and not bad imitations of men, she most prized and admired.

After this marriage of Harvey Wyndham’s nothing of consequence happened for many long months. Times and seasons came and went, and still all things in Seymour Street remained pretty much as before. Sometimes there was a flush of good luck among them, and a little rivulet of gold trickling through the barren spaces of poverty ; and then old debts were paid, long-standing wants

supplied, and small chips hacked off for Mrs. Osborn's private pleasures ; and sometimes times were bad with them, when all had to suffer alike.

But through it all Isola kept up the quarterly payments for her poor mad husband in the asylum ; though she often found herself forestalled when Richard Norton for old friendship and pity for Mark Aylott's son, and Harvey Wyndham for conscience, had been to see the wretched man, and had taken care of him for the ensuing three months. Even hard men and selfish men do these things sometimes—God never wholly deserting the human soul.

But after a time the need of this was over, and there was no longer that melancholy maintenance to think of. The peace of death stilled the tumult of life, and the long dark trial came to an end. Mercifully for him his reason never returned to him, and he died without knowing the bitter truth of his later days. Isola was with him in his last illness, tending him as devotedly as if they had been "young lovers newly wed," or as if he had been the hero of her life, or the

child of her love. All the misery and mistakes of their marriage were forgotten now, and she saw in the wreck before her only the man who had been the husband of her youth, and the loving if oppressive ruler of her life.

It was in the grey of the early morning when she was sitting by the bedside of the dying maniac, holding his feverish hand in hers. It had been a ghastly night—wild, bewildered, full of agony and raving—a night of nameless terror, and of all that agony of suspense when on either side lies sorrow, and when one can but sit in patience, waiting for the anguish that must come.

All through these last terrible days St. John had not once recognized who it was that sat by him through the dark hours of the night and the burning hours of the day alike; he did not know whose hands wiped the clammy moisture from his face, or cooled his parched lips, or smoothed his restless pillow. He had just a dumb, vague consciousness of something sweeter than his usual portion of human care of late times; but that was all; and not voice nor tears nor kisses touched

the chord of memory, or cleared the mists from his poor crazed brain. But now a strange influx of peace seemed to steal down upon him, as if it had been an atmosphere visibly descending. Suddenly, as if waking from a dream, he looked at her long and earnestly. The feverish talk subsided, the tossing restlessness was stilled, the mad glare passed out of his eyes, and the human expression of love and sorrow and a sad reproach came back into them. But it was then too late; the Order of Release had come, and the kindly angel whom we call Death stood by the bed, beckoning the imprisoned spirit to rise and come away.

Smiling plaintively but very sweetly, he feebly drew his wasted hand over the face bending lovingly over him.

“Why have you been so long away, Isola?” he said. “I have wanted you so much! I love you, Isola—I have always loved you. Say you love me too, Isola!”

He raised himself by one supreme effort, and pressed his lips to hers. Then a quiver passed

through his limbs, his eyes turned, his jaw dropped, and with a deep sigh his last breath went, and the sad story of his life was at an end.

* * * * *

Years after this, Isola was sitting in the dingy drawing-room at Seymour Street. The golden hair was dimmer, the dark blue eyes less bright, the face was paler, and the form less generous than in olden times, and yet she was still beautiful—beautiful with that divinest beauty of thought, and purpose, and the purification of sorrow, and the grace of love.

It was in the dusk of a chilly winter evening as she sat by the fire, telling pretty fairy stories to a dark-eyed Spanish-looking boy hanging caressingly about her. She had just come to where Prince Great-Heart arrives in a flying chariot to rescue the Princess Fair-Star from the power of the wicked witch, when she heard a man's footsteps tramp heavily up the stairs. She thought merely, as she heard them, that the lodger had come home early to-night; and then she forgot that she had heard them at all, as she

went on with her fairy story, coming quickly now to the happy ending.

“I wanted you to see her without her seeing you,” whispered Jane to a tall man standing by her, and looking through the half-opened door. “She’s better worth looking at than any woman on this earth. There may be one or two like her in heaven!—but that’s doubtful!”

The firelight fell on the foster-mother and the boy as they sat together—he hanging round her, she leaning back in her chair; it lighted up the gracious golden head of the one, and the soft black locks of the other, and made a picture which the man, standing by the door, had many a night prayed God to realize for him once more before he died. The steady hazel eyes were moist, and the firm lips beneath the thick moustache quivered, as the long and heavy step came through the room, and Gilbert Holmes laid his hand on Isola’s arm.

“Brother Gilbert!” she cried, starting up and clasping his hands in hers. She could say no more. Her heart stopped still for the very dread

of her great joy, and she fell against his breast ; where he held her.

“ My sister ! ” he said, and kissed her tenderly. “ Now you have seen your last of sorrow. I have come to take care of you, Isola ! ”

“ Is this Prince Great-Heart, mamma ? ” asked Reginald with a child’s amaze ; and Jane, rubbing her nose, said in an odd voice, “ Well, Regy, I suspect he may turn out to be Prince Great-Heart before all’s done, if you’ll be a good boy and do your work like a man ! There’s no Great-Heart else, Regy, for you or anybody, take my word for it ! ”

THE END.

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